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QUAINT SPECIMENS



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QUAINT SPECIMENS

BY

EVOE

(B. V. KNOX)



METHUEN & CO. LTD.

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The greater part of the contents of this book has previously appeared in the pages of *Punch*, and the author's thanks are due to Messrs. Bradbury and Agnew for allowing that part to be reprinted here.

PARODIES

THE HERO AT HOME

A SCENE FROM A SOCIETY NOVEL

“ And he made a covering for the tent of rams’ skins dyed red, and a covering of badgers’ skins above that.”—*Exodus* xxxvi. 19.

SO Sonia was coming to Garth. And she was going to be married to Bill. Hardly knowing what he did, Bertram leant his forehead against the cold marble of the smoking-room mantelpiece and kicked his left leg with his right shoe until the intense pain in his calf brought him to his senses again. In the billiard-room he could hear the monotonous clicking of the balls as Rupert played himself a hundred up for the sixth time in succession, while from the lawn outside came the short staccato bark of senseless laughter with which Basil greeted the holing of a four-inch putt on

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the clock golf links. A blight seemed to have fallen upon the house-party ever since the news came. Where was Rosalind? He did not know. Writing out the dinner menu, it might be, on a slate in her bedroom, or going for a walk towards Boring with the wolf-hounds and the Pekinese. Poor Rosalind! She loved him. But the others? There were so many of them. Honoria? He had always hated Honoria. Alaric? He was nothing but a boy. Dick and Jane? He could not remember for the moment whether Dick and Jane were people or ponies. General Ponsonby, he knew would be in the library. Peter had motored himself to London. Dorothy was breaking in a horse. Nevil was writing reminiscences. There was no one about. Half mechanically he touched the bell. Quite mechanically it emitted a faint whirr.

"I am going out to feed the goldfish," he said to the man who answered it. "Bring me some bread-crumbs to the pond."

As he crossed the lawn he noticed almost unconsciously that part of the binding of

The Hero at Home

Basil's putter had come undone. So much in their lives that had been fastened had come undone. His head whirled. He could not escape from a feeling that he alone was alive, and that all the others, Dick, Susan, Honoria, Basil, Rupert, Peter, Dorothy and the rest, were figments of a dream. The very house which he was leaving was a monstrous castle of cards which might collapse at any moment. The expressionless manservant carrying the Wedgwood bowl upon the silver salver seemed a painted puppet of his imagination.

He sat down carelessly on one of the rustic seats. Two of the bars were worn rotten with age, and he went right through them. It was not till he was sitting on the ground that he noticed what he had done. Getting up again he chose a different seat, and buried his head in his hands. Most men had been in love with Sonia at one time or other, most of the men in the house had been in love with her and now she was going to be married. She was going to be married to Bill—Bill Allardyce, whom he had promised Lady

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Allardyce ever since his private school days to guard and protect. He remembered the immemorial pride of the Allardyces, their seclusion from the world, Bill's complete innocence, his frank contempt for everything that was not quite cricket, not quite playing the game.

Bill and Sonia. Sonia and Bill. Sonia. The semblance of her face, now mournful and pensive, now flushed with hectic excitement, seemed to rise from the pond in a sort of mist before him. He threw some bread-crumbs at it, and it went away. What was he going to say to her, to Bill, to Lady Allardyce, to any of them? More clearly than anything there stood out the picture of that night when, tired and frightened by the drunken revelry and *chemin de fer* in Rupert's rooms, Sonia had crept round to his flat and asked to be taken in. He remembered how he had stroked her hair and she had straightened his tie. And then he had made her up a bed on his sofa and tucked her up for the night. . . .

Had he been a fool to insist next morning

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that they must be married at once to save her from any possible tarnish of scandal? And then that they must separate at once? He had not seen her since that night, except for the brief hurried ceremony at the registrar's office, for always his chivalry had insisted that there should be no obligation, no bond between them. It had been enough for him to hope. If ever she tired of the others, there was the shelter of his name. Reluctantly enough, at the time, she had agreed. How difficult it had been to hire men to burn down the registrar's office on the following afternoon. And yet it had been done. No record existed save that which Sonia held. Yet somehow he had never imagined that she would marry again. His Sonia! How had she ever come to meet Bill? And how was it that, seeing him every day at White's, Bill had failed to tell him of their love?

The crunch of a footstep on the gravel path and the scent of a cigar aroused him from his meditations. It was General Ponsonby. He was discreet and kindly, a shrewd old man, a

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contemporary of his father. His only fault was a habit of quoting Shakespeare. There could be no harm in putting the case hypothetically to him.

“What do you think, sir,” he said, making room on the garden seat, “about this engagement of Bill’s ? ”

“There is a tide in the affairs of men,” murmured the General, sitting down with considerable care and keeping the ash on his cigar.

“Supposing one is Bill’s oldest friend and knows something about—against—something that Bill ought to know ? ”

“The quality of mercy is not strained,” said the old man solemnly.

“Then you think that if she had already contracted——”

“‘It seems she hangs upon the cheek of night.’ ”

“But supposing——”

“‘Ay, ay ! Antipholus, look strange and frown.’ ”

Bertram sighed. Obviously there was no

The Hero at Home

help here. After all, there was the whole of the historical plays and Cymbeline to come yet. He rose from the seat and the General got up with him. As they moved from the shrubbery on to the lawn a burst of sunlight flooded it, as though all the figures gathered there had been suddenly illuminated by the limelight of a stage. It seemed to him that he was the only one who had not learnt the lines that he must speak, who was entering without a cue. Alaric was whistling softly to himself. Dorothy was reading the "Illustrated London News." Honoria and Nevil were playing at bumblepuppy. Sonia was there, talking to Rosalind. Bill was saying something to Lady Allardyce. Basil was lying down studying the lie of a putt. Rupert was mixing cocktails at a small table under the upas-tree. Sir John Allardyce was blowing his nose. The whole atmosphere was tensely charged with electricity. To Bertram the sense of boding unreality grew almost oppressive. What was he going to say?

As they moved forward into the sunlight

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Sonia detached herself from the group on the lawn and came towards them. Her face was pale and she moved jerkily. Her bobbed hair, cut with a low fringe in front, gave her the appearance of a Dutch doll. Her dark eyes swam with tears.

In a moment the immensity of his love welled over him, and he knew that he could never tell. Then he realized that there was something worse, something beyond his power to help.

"What is it, Sonia?" he cried anxiously, as the General moved away, his lips framing slowly the line:

"Come, sir, to dinner! Dromio, keep the gate!"

"It's all up, Bertram," she said, with a wan smile on her strained face. "They know."

"They can't possibly."

"They do. That photograph which was taken by the 'Topic.' The one that was taken outside the office. The one you managed to suppress. Rosalind has a proof of it. Our names are printed underneath. Lady

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Allardyce knows. They all know. Look"—and her voice broke—"look at Bill."

Bertram looked at the group again. Rupert was still mixing cocktails; Basil beginning the back swing for his putt. Bill was sitting on the ground, was beating the ground with his heels: he had the face of a heart-broken man. Lady Allardyce had taken one of his hands and Rosalind the other. Sir John was holding a small piece of paper which fluttered in the light breeze. Nevil and Honoria stood motionless, mouths open, their rackets lifted in the air.

"Sonia," he whispered, and the voice seemed to come from some one he did not know, "do you care for him so much? Couldn't you even now be happy with me?"

She shook her head.

"If I can't marry Bill, my dearest, there is nothing for it but the pond."

"It's only ten inches deep," he said, with a desperate attempt to be cheerful. "And there are frogs in it. I saw one just now. You know you never liked frogs, Sonia."

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And then suddenly the burden rolled itself away from his mind. He knew what he must do. He strode into the midst of the group and took the piece of paper from Sir John's trembling hand.

"I think some of us are under a slight misapprehension," he said, speaking gaily, "about this—er—this photograph. Sonia tells me that you think you recognize——"

"We simply recognize that Sonia is trying to commit bigamy, that is all," said Rosalind, looking at him with hard eyes.

"Pardon me, I think not," said Bertram coolly. "Let me read what is written underneath :

" ' CUPID STILL BUSY

" ' Mr. Bertram Rendall with his bride (Lady Sonia Carnwath) and friend, outside the Marylebone Register Office.' "

"Well ?" said Lady Allardyce in a voice of stone.

"Do you deny that that is your photograph, sir ?" cried Sir John ; and behind him came

The Hero at Home

the hoarse bark of Basil as he holed the twelfth in one. .

“And Sonia’s?” said Rosalind fiercely.

“We were both there,” said Bertram, looking straight at her, “but the paper made a trifling mistake. Sonia was merely our witness. I married the friend. She was a woman,—a woman of no reputation. She has since disappeared.”

“Sonia!” gasped Bill, getting up.

“‘The trumpets, sackbuts, psalteries and fifes,’” murmured General Ponsonby, shaking hands with Sir John.

“Make it a Bronx, Rupert,” said Bertram, turning sharply towards the upas-tree, “and be quick.”

THE HERO ABROAD

(*After the manner of Mr. John Masefield*)

PREFACE

HARD TASKER was the chief chanty-maker of the *Waymisser*, out of *Weymouth* by *Misadventure*, bound for San Miguele in cokernuts. About the *Waymisser* has been written in a sonnet :

“ Her sheer was like a sheldrake, her jibboom
 Resembled panthers : she was all a joy.
Built on the Clyde to butt into the spume,
 Her scantlings were as wayward as a boy.”

The other ten lines of the sonnet were lost in the revolution which happened in San Miguele in 1863.

About Hard Tasker has been written in another sonnet :

The Hero Abroad

“A lean man with a multitude of scars
And always there where there were any fights;
Punctured with bullets in a thousand bars
And covered head to foot with beetle bites.”

The rest of this sonnet was lost in the revolution which happened in San Miguele in 1864. Just before my story opens Hard Tasker was at San Miguele again, on the *Waymisser*, and looking hard for more trouble. He was trying to find Ocarina, whom he did not know by sight, but had loved long ago as a child. In doing this he missed his way to the *Waymisser*, and became lost in the thorn woods of San Miguele. They were positively fetid with decay.

THRILL THE FIRST

“This is a gully,” thought Hard. “To reach the *Waymisser* I must either go round it or through it. To go round it will be shorter, but to go through it will be harder. I will go through it.”

The ravine was full of rampikes, corruption and bog. In some places it was stagnant with green ooze, in others it was shining with

Quaint Specimens

a film of death. The air was hot with the heavy scent of iguana flowers with great pale faces which seemed to mow at him.

"It is a pity," thought Hard, "that they mow at me, but I must go on now ; otherwise I shall have to go back."

He began to feel a little sick and giddy. Then suddenly he remembered that the scent of the iguana flowers was the scent which was leading him to Ocarina. He looked at the iguana flowers, and they did not mow any more. They smiled. A terebinth bit him behind. He let himself down cautiously into the ooze, which made a sucking noise and held him fast. Above the sucking sound of the marsh he began to hear the sucking sound of the leeches which were draining the blood from his legs.

"I must get out of here," thought Hard, "as soon as I can." And he began to sing a sea chanty which the hands on the *Way-misser* had always sung when they bunted the staysail to the chafing-gear in the port-royal trucks :

The Hero Abroad

“Heave-ho, yo-ho,
Yo-ho, heave-ho,
Heave all together—
Yo-heave-ho !”

A mocassin flew into his mouth as he was singing and bit him on the tongue. He sank still further, so that now his eyes were above the slime. A few yards in front of him there lay a log.

“If I could get a foothold on that log,” thought Hard, “I should have something to stand upon.”

He gave a great wrench and tore himself free. He gripped the log with both hands and hoisted himself up on to it. The log rolled over, and he pitched head foremost into the green ooze, full of putrefaction and viscid death. Only his feet remained above the bog. His feet were bare, for the leeches had sucked off his boots.

“This is unpleasant,” thought Hard. “I must get out of here at once.”

He worked his way up through the mud and grappled the log again. . . . Clouds of poison

Quaint Specimens

flies on his face and hands. When he had drawn himself up on the log it began to sink suddenly. Hard knew then that the log must be a crocodile. He could feel the life in its rough scaly surface with his bare feet.

"I must stop it from sinking," he thought, "or it will go down."

He remembered that to master a crocodile one must press its eyeballs with both thumbs. Moving cautiously along he felt for its eyeballs and pressed his big toes into them. There was a stretch of fetid water between himself and the bank. Bubbles kept rising to the top of it and bursting with an abominable smell. The swamp was full of dead llamas and water-rats.

"Nevertheless I must jump now," thought Hard, "and swim for it."

He swung both hands and prepared to jump. As he did so he remembered a day, many years ago, on the *Waymiser*, when he had jumped down the main hatchway to look for the fo'c'sle, and hurt his forehead against the mainbrace of a bulkhead. Then he jumped.

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As he did so he felt a sharp pain above the knee. The crocodile, released, had bitten a piece out of his right leg. The pain ran like a livid fire through the whole of his body. Tentacles of pain clutched at the cockles of his heart. His muscles grew numb with pain. He was too dizzy to swim. His right leg was useless now. He trod water with his left.

"I must swim nevertheless," he thought, "and swim soon or the crocodile will bite me again."

He began to swim. The bank was very steep and thick with the rotting trunks of trees. His hair was full of scorpions, and there were white ants in his ears. As he drew near to the bank an ounce looked out of its drey and snarled at him. He slapped it in the face and it disappeared. He caught hold of the root of a tree, hoping to draw himself up on to the bank. The bank broke off and fell into the water. There was nothing left but an evil wall of swamp, full of white fungoid growth that seemed to drip with blood. . . .

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THRILL THE SECOND

Hard was in prison. He had been arrested for falling off a truck. He had travelled on the truck because by doing so he would have to walk four hundred miles over the mountains to get to the coast again.

"It will be a long walk," thought Hard, "but it will be worth it."

The floor of the prison was made of baked mud and very difficult to dig. Hard began to dig with his sailor's clasp-knife. Hard went on digging with his hands and teeth. When he had dug for two hours he had made a hole as deep as a man. Then he looked up and saw that there was an opening in the roof. He climbed out. In jumping over the adobe wall he kicked a sleeping soldier.

"Dog of a gringo!" muttered the soldier.

Hard ran. The street became full of soldiers shooting at him. Bullets began to hit him in the legs and make holes through them. He could hear the wind whistling through the holes as he ran. It made a thin piping sound.

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Hard ran harder. The sun was terribly hot. He saw that he would have more chance of covering his head from the sun if he could get a hat, and he had left his hat in the prison. He ran into a house, climbed upstairs into the bedroom of a sleeping man, stole his hat and jumped out of the window.

“Dog of a gringo!” muttered the man.

Hard fell head-first into a midden. He got up and ran till he reached the river-bed. Soldiers with bloodhounds were pursuing him. He dodged them and lay behind a boulder. Every time he put his hat above the boulder it was riddled with bullets.

“I must keep my head down,” thought Hard, “or I shall be shot.”

He had had no food for five days. Finally the men went away. By mistake during their volleys they had shot a terebinth. Hard cooked the body over a wood-fire, ate it and went on. The pain in his stomach was excruciating. He knew that he had four hundred miles to walk, but he did not know the way to begin.

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THRILL THE THIRD

Every time that Hard slipped on the narrow mountain-path the vultures came and beat him with their wings. He hit one in the face, but it pecked him in the hand. He was fainting with hunger and thirst. He found a buzzard's nest. The eggs in it were stale, but he ate them with delight. Once he met a white-skinned Occidentale and asked him the way to the coast, but the man shot at him. Another time he met a yellow-skinned Accidentale, and asked him the way, but the man spat at him. "If you come any nearer I will cut out your tripes," said the man.

"I am not very popular in this evil land," thought Hard. Then he remembered the scent of iguana flowers and went on. He had stopped the draught through his legs by stuffing up the holes with carib-leaves.

He came to the top of the mountain-pass. All the mountains were carved at the top into the shapes of savage and terrible gods which

The Hero Abroad

vomited red blood from their gigantic mouths. This gave an uncomfortable feeling to the mountain tops. The blood was water with iron ore in it, but Hard did not know this, and he hurried over the mountain-pass until he came to a forest on the other side. When he reached the forest it caught fire.

"There is a power of evil," thought Hard, "which is opposing me." He was becoming a little light-headed now. Sometimes he felt that, if he had not taken such a long journey in the wrong direction, he would have been more likely to find Ocarina, and more likely in the end to get back to his ship.

He had had no food since the buzzard eggs, many days ago, but now he found some honeycomb in the trunk of a fallen tree. He sat down and shared it with an armadillo. . . .

THRILL THE FOURTH

Hard was in San Miguele again. The *Waymisser* had been wrecked off Cape Horn, but two sonnets about her had been published by Lloyds in their Shipping Report. On the

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water-front Hard heard a voice calling him from an evil shuttered house. He knew that the house was full of rum-smugglers, voodoo-worshippers, desperadoes and dacoits. The voice was the voice of Ocarina, and she seemed to be in pain. The night was very dark.

“ Shall I summon the guardias ? ” thought Hard. “ No, for there are many parts of my body which are quite undamaged yet.”

He burst into the house and an Indian seized him by the legs. He kicked the Indian in the face, but another Indian gripped him round the waist. The house was writhing with Indians. They tied Hard hand-and-foot and bound him to a stake in the middle of the dining-room. By the light of two candles on an altar he saw that Ocarina was tied to another stake by his side. A huge man with an evil face, dressed in the robes of a priest, came into the room.

“ Who are you ? ” asked Hard.

“ I am the Priest of Evil,” he said.

“ I thought as much,” sneered Hard ; “ you look a lousy swine.”

The Hero Abroad

The man came up and broke both Hard's arms with a fulcrum. Then he ordered Hard to be released.

"You can fight me now," he said. "After that I will sacrifice you and your woman on the altar and drink the blood."

"Thank you," said Hard, and began to fight him with his feet. The Indians tripped him up and tied him to the stake again. The room became empty. Hard began to talk to Ocarina in a quiet voice about their youth, when they had met as children long ago.

"But we are in a difficult position now," said Hard.

She fixed her great eyes on him. They looked like iguana flowers, and Hard was comforted.

There was a brazier in the room, on which carib-leaves were burning. They were almost stifled by the fumes. Hard sneezed. Ocarina was coughing quietly to herself. The Priest of Evil came into the room again and put his face close up against Hard's.

Quaint Specimens

"Have I the power, or have you?" he asked.

"I have," said Hard quickly, and bit off his nose.

"You shall pay for this," said the priest.

He took a great shining sword and pressed it against Hard's breast.

"You filthy porcupine!" said Hard.

Two Indians began to scalp him. The blood trickled down his face. Two other Indians were pommelling his ribs. Two others were hitting him in the wind.

"Never mind," said Ocarina. "You are the conqueror."

"I know I am," said Hard, and smiled.

He gave the shrill bosun's whistle which he had learnt on the *Waymisser* as a boy, and then began to sing the *Waymisser's* chanty:

"Heave-ho, yo-ho,
Yo-ho, heave-ho,
Heave all together—
Yo-heave-ho."

Just as he was finishing the fourth line the guardias of San Miguele burst into the room. . . .

THE PECULIAR LADY

(*With acknowledgments to Mr. Michael Arlen.*)

THEY had been asking me for months whether I had read "The Green Hat," but I was obliged to say, "No. 'The Green Hat' I have not read. No, I am not a great reader, I, of books."

But often I had looked out of my little window and hoped to see "The Green Hat" underneath, waiting there on the doorstep, so that I could go down and ask it to come in and be read. Only libraries are so slow. So slow they are. *En retard.*

It came at last, however, that book. I remember that I was having muffins for tea. Very satisfying, you might say, but there is a cloyingness.

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“ Desire is the name of the plant that Lilith sowed, and every now and then it puts out the flower that in the choir of flowers is the paramour of the mandrake.”

I must write, thought I, to one of the famous bulb-growers of Holland, and ask him if he has any packets of bulbs like that. *This so fine first garden favourite beautifies the border and puts forth a flower to gladden all hearts and homes by becoming the paramour of the mandrake.*

Yes, but one can't do that, you know, on muffins.

Not on muffins, no.

* * *

Afterwards I must have dozed. Dozed and then opened my eyes again ; because the book was somehow all different like. Common it was. Not nice at all. And I seemed to have got into the book. Also I seemed to be a doctor. A nerve specialist of some kind or other.

“ I have come to ask you——” she began. The voice was husky under the yellow bonnet

The Peculiar Lady

with the silver stork upon it—Oi, but that rhymes, Iris ; you forgive ?—the silver stork that flew and flew.

“ But about ? ” I asked.

“ So much.” One great topaz eye shone out under the yellow bonnet’s brim.

“ So much,” she said again and sighed, still huskily. “ My face, first of all. It’s like a round white circle, you know, very small. Ought it to be like that ? People gather sometimes from my voice that my face is very round and white and small. I wonder how it is they do that. There’s scarcely room in my face, you know, for my eyes.”

She tilted the brim of the bonnet ever so little. I could see both of her eyes now. That was a fair lady, oo ! but a sad lady, that one. Rather like an owl. One felt that she was immemorial, beyond falsehood and treachery, a lady to whom lying was not nor truth, not modesty nor shame, not honour nor disgrace, not anything very much, in fact, but eyes. Yellow in the white mask of her face with the shingled orange hair.

Quaint Specimens

"What is the matter with them?" I asked.

"People complain," she said, "that they dazzle so."

She gave a vague brittle laugh. Brittle it was, and vague.

"Just hark at that."

I harked.

She did it again.

"That happens often to Iris Storm. I was a March. The Marches have never been let off anything, and they never let off anyone else. But to come back to my eyes."

"Oi, yes. To your eyes."

"They frighten the mice, you know. There are dreams and there are beasts. The dreams walk glittering up and down the soiled loneliness of desire. The beasts prowl about the soiled loneliness of regret. My eyes go glittering up and down the soiled loneliness too. That is why they frighten the mice."

I looked at her again. She had an adorable chassis.

I could now see in the white circle that was

The Peculiar Lady

her face, underneath the topaz lamps that were her eyes, the thin red carmine streak that was her lips. She leaned back in my chair. From one hand—oh, how naked that hand looked!—there drooped a starting-lever, a heavy thing.

“But to go on,” I said, “about your eyes.”

I had not turned on the light. There was no need to turn on a light in any room however dark where Iris Storm's eyes were. But I offered her a cigarette. She accepted it with a gesture that was not a gesture, but the perfect non-gesture of a woman imperious and classless, equal to a man. Outside, the velvet dark was pierced by a thousand seeming lance-points of militant flame. They were not really lance-points. They were stars. But inside, here and on that chair, was that lady; and from her hand heavily the starting-lever drooped.

“Sometimes I don't know what to do about them,” came the husky clear voice, and that then expired. She moved ever so slightly in her chair. The voice was born again.

Quaint Specimens

"Sometimes they are cool, impersonal, sensible ; sometimes like spoonfuls of treacle ; and then again like hard stones worn by fire, or like heads of nails or yellow fog. And then again they have the magic of open spaces in them ; and that is the worst hell of all. And after that they just become lamps again—in the shameless night of desire. Do you know why I carry this starting-lever ? "

I shook my head.

"When I see a man I like, I drop it on his toes."

"Tell me no more, Iris Storm," I said, shrinking back. "Tell me no more ! " I cried.

She smiled—oh, smiled.

"See that ? " she said.

I answered thus and thus.

"Do you know what happened to me one day when I smiled ? Guess."

"I can't guess," said I.

"Well, my very white teeth bit the moment into two pieces with their smile and dropped the pieces into limbo. Only fancy that. Fact is, whatever I do with my face the most

The Peculiar Lady

appalling things occur. There was one day when my heartless pregnant voice seemed to fall to the floor like a small bird with broken wings. It did truly. I scarcely dare to shake my shingled orange hair for fear of something happening to the furniture. I want to know if there is anything I can take for it, dear friend ? ”

I looked at the yellow bonnet. I looked at the white stork upon it—I mean above it. She leaned forward in her chair, and it creaked a little. I seemed to swim in the topaz light of her eyes. The hand—and how naked that hand seemed !—that held the starting-lever was balancing it above my right boot. In another moment it would have fallen—and then . . .

* * *

A footstep sounded on the stairs and the door was burst roughly open. At the same moment I knew for the first time that it was night no longer. A grey dawn was savaging the roofs and chimneys of Mayfair. The lights in the eyes of Iris Storm burnt lower as the chauffeur said, “ Begging your pardon,

Quaint Specimens

Madam, but can I take the car home now ? ”

“ Shall I go with him ? ” said she, turning, that lady, to me.

“ Yes,” I said, and “ Oh, yes,” and, taking the starting-lever gently from her hand, I pressed it, but oh ! and now I was happy, into his.

Very woman she rose and, making a gesture that was no gesture yet so humbled me that I stood shamefast, lightly she ran down the stairs. But she had torn first the starting-lever from the fellow’s hand. He stood by me dazed.

We heard the whisper of the engine, then the gathering whirr of the wheels, before he had so much recovered himself as to move. . . . Then and suddenly, at the end of South Audley Street, there was a tearing crash, a single cry. Both of us sprang to the window. Together we sprang.

Flung half-way across the pavement by the lamp-post it had shattered was the wrecked car, and beside it all that was left of that which had been Iris Storm.

The Peculiar Lady

“But that death,” screamed the chauffeur
—“that death!”

“Go and pick up,” I said to him sternly,
“all that is left of that which was Iris
Storm. Remember that she was a Viscount’s
daughter.”

MY BROTHER GREGORY

Quaint Specimens

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MY BROTHER GREGORY

THE PERFECT GUEST

ON the hill opposite there is a tumulus ; one sees it from the garden of the cottage ; the sheep with their tinkling bells graze over it and around it. Little they think, as Lord Macaulay puts it, on those strong limbs that moulder deep below. Nor as a matter of fact do I think on them much at ordinary times. It was my brother Gregory who first made me do so.

“ I think I’m coming down to spend the week-end with you,” he said.

“ Not if I know it,” I answered, a little brusquely perhaps, but you must understand that Gregory is hardly the fellow to take a quiet hint.

“ I suppose I’d better bring golf-clubs,” he went on. “ What kind of course is it ? ”

Quaint Specimens

“Practically untouched since the Romans came,” I responded cheerfully. “The pagan soil that Wilfred found, if you remember.”

“Never mind,” said Gregory; “it’ll be good for a round or so yet. What else is there to do?”

In all the books on etiquette that I have read it is explained that the tactful host does not map out the day too precisely for his guest in advance; there seems to be no established code of honour preventing the tactless guest from mapping out the day too precisely for his host. I felt that Gregory was taking advantage of this.

“There are many primroses,” I told him, “in the little hollows of the woods—primroses and violets. How will you like to go out and fill your hands with bunches of primroses and violets, Gregory?”

“One can bathe, I suppose,” he continued meditatively. “Would you mind if I brought down my red-striped bathing-suit?”

“Not if you keep the bathroom door shut,” I said.

The Perfect Guest

"In the sea, I meant. You could run me down before breakfast in the car, if the weather's decent, couldn't you? It's not more than a mile away."

I looked rather anxiously at him.

"Feverish, I'm afraid," I said in a soothing voice—"feverish. Does the heart murmur at all, I wonder?"

Gregory puffed at his pipe.

"Are there any horses, by the way?" he asked suddenly.

I jumped.

"How do you mean, are there any horses?" I said.

"Can't we get a couple of horses to ride on?"

One might have supposed I was living on the pampas.

"I should think you could easily hire a couple of horses in Westingham and have them sent out. I should rather like a gallop in the morning over the downs."

"You weren't thinking of doing any shooting, were you?" I asked a little bitterly. "I

Quaint Specimens

noticed a lot of bullfinches on the downs the last time I was there."

"I'll see what I can arrange as we go through," said Gregory quietly. "After all, one must fill in the time somehow, you know. What time do we start? I'll drive if you like."

* * *

I was aroused next morning from my beauty sleep by the rattling of stones on my window. I jumped out of bed and trod on a pebble. Looking out of the window I observed a man holding an unoccupied horse and Gregory sitting on another. The first horse looked up at me with an indescribably unpleasant expression. I noticed that it had far more ridges on it than Gregory's.

The air struck chill. Far away I could perceive the cold shining sea beyond the gap in the downs. A thought occurred to me.

"You've not had your dip yet, Gregory," I shouted. "Why not have that while I get ready?"

There was always a chance, I reflected, that the man might get himself drowned.

The Perfect Guest

"Don't be an ass," shouted Gregory cheerfully. "Hurry up and come down."

I began to shave.

* * *

"What you ought to do here," said Gregory after breakfast, "is to level away all this grass slope between you and the road and make a tennis-court—a hard tennis-court, I think."

He had eaten, I noticed, all the marmalade.

"There's a drain," I said coldly, "underneath that grass slope. At least I like to believe there is."

"Oh, nonsense!" he cried; "you needn't touch that. Come out with me now and I'll show you where to begin. We might make a start on it before we go to the links. Have you got any spades?"

"Having no spades——" I began, but Gregory was too quick for me. He had discovered the outhouse. Like a fool I had not locked it up. A moment later he had discovered two monstrous-looking instruments of torture inside. I took one and toyed with it. Owing to the unpleasant horse with the ridges I was

Quaint Specimens

already aching all—well, I was aching, anyhow. Gregory turned round and began to dig. It was then that, gazing upwards from the garden to the hill, I let my fancy play lightly around the green tumulus. How many Romans, I fancied, how many Danes, how many other unwelcome intruders might not lie buried beneath its ancient soil? I wondered whether a little tumulus would not be a handsome addition to my own small garden. I looked at Gregory's strong limbs and thought. I lifted up my spade.

Then suddenly I checked myself. "The tactful host," I murmured, "does not map out the day too precisely for his guest in advance."

I began to help Gregory to dig.

THE FAN-BELT

“ I DON'T like the smell that your engine is making,” said Gregory, “ and I don't like the noise.”

“ I'm afraid I must have boiled it,” I said.

“ How on earth,” he inquired, “ did you come to do that ? ”

“ No simple feat of cookery is beyond me,” I answered modestly. “ Mine is one of these light cheap cars, you know. As a matter of fact the radiator-fan won't keep its belt on. Lots of men at garages have tried to make it keep its belt on, but directly we start off again it joyously hurls the thing aside. Like Cytherea, you know, with loosened zone——”

“ The hullabaloo,” repeated Gregory, “ is horrible.”

I stopped and readjusted the fan-belt. In a few miles it was off again.

Quaint Specimens

"I've never heard anything like this," said Gregory plaintively, "since I lived with a man who had asthma."

"There's something rather beautiful about the noise of asthma, don't you think?" I said, seeking to cheer him. "Sometimes a solemn stately roll like an organ, at other times a reedy fluting like the pipes of Pan."

Happily at this moment Gregory's attention was diverted.

"I'm perfectly certain," he said, "that you've taken the wrong road."

"I've been perfectly certain of it for some time," I said, "but, you see, there isn't room to turn round. It has always been a great mystery to me, Gregory, what happens when one cart or car meets another in a Norfolk lane like this. There used to be a story about two goats meeting each other on a mountain ledge. One of them lay down, I fancy, and let the other crawl over its back; but you couldn't very well do that even with a light cheap car like mine."

The Fan-Belt

“There’s a fork in the lane ahead,” observed Gregory ; “let’s look at the map.”

“Much better turn round,” I said.

Between the two prongs of the fork there was a narrow triangular slip of long grass with the apex pointing towards us.

“I think,” I said, “that I can just back her over this.”

I ran her up the left-hand prong and backed her. There was a rather curious and unforeseen result. The narrow slip of long grass was not a narrow slip of long grass at all. It was a narrow slip of high earth with short grass on the top of it. The back wheels of the car went over with a terrific bump. The front wheels stayed. The body of the car was now resting with the earth as its sole support. All the wheels were in the air. They dangled feebly. One had the impression of a newly-landed fish. The engine stopped running. With great presence of mind I put on the hand-brake.

“I think we will get out now, Gregory,” I said, “and stretch our legs for a little.”

Quaint Specimens

I have forgotten what Gregory said.

It was close upon high noon. Fields of barley waved upon either side of us. The sun blazed hotly down. At first there seemed no sound.

“Hark!” said Gregory. “What’s that?”

“It’s a corn-crake,” I said. “Running perfectly, too. Not a vestige of a roar.”

“Well,” he grumbled, “what are you going to do about it all?”

I thought.

I developed a theory after a few moments that, if we jacked up the front axle, placing a few large stones between the jack and the axle and then flung ourselves violently against the bonnet of the car, we could thrust it off backwards, so that the hind wheels touched the ground and the front wheels fell on the grass. It was a clever theory, and one that would have appealed to Archimedes; but it did not work. Besides, the radiator was frightfully hot.

“One or both of us,” said Gregory, “will have to walk back to Norwich.”

“There’s a nursery-rhyme about that,” I

The Fan-Belt

pointed out. "Why not wait here and see if another car comes along?"

"I don't see how it could help us if it did," objected Gregory.

"No, nor do I," I agreed; "but it would have to stop and sympathize. For one thing, we've blocked both roads now, so it couldn't pass by on the other side. It would have to offer us oil and wine."

We sat down on the grass and smoked to keep off the flies.

"I'll tell you what I could do," I said after about twenty minutes, "to while away the time. I could recite a little poem by Hannah More. Did you ever read 'Sir Eldred'?"

"Cold, speechless, senseless, Eldred near
Gazed on the deed he'd done,
Like the blank statue of Despair
Or Madness graved in stone."

That was when he had just returned from the Crusades and killed his lady BIRTHA in her bower, together with the man whom he thought to be her lover. But it was really her brother

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Edwy, you know. Then her father turned up and saw the bodies and died too from the shock. Very awkward for Sir Eldred. There is a moral to the poem :

“ ‘ The deadliest wounds with which we bleed
Our crimes inflict alone,
Man's *mercies* from God's hand proceed,
His *mis'ries* from his own.' ”

“ I don't think I care very much for recitations,” said Gregory. “ Hullo, what's that ? ”

There was an earth-shaking noise apparently quite close to us.

“ Something is coming,” I hazarded. “ I will go and sound my horn. Always the true knight of the highway. No one shall ever accuse me of driving to the public danger.”

I went and tooted vigorously several times. The noise increased in volume, but nothing appeared.

“ I know,” said Gregory suddenly. “ It's behind the hedge.”

It was. It was a motor-tractor attached to an agricultural machine. There were two strong men with it. They were about to

The Fan-Belt

burst forth upon the road a little way up the right-hand fork.

"They can't tow us off, anyway," said Gregory. "They might give us a ride into Norwich perhaps."

"They can't do that either," I pointed out, "because they can't get by. I shouldn't wonder if we aren't the only people who've ever blocked up two roads at once with one car."

We took counsel with the Norfolk men. That is to say, Gregory and I explained the position volubly, while they said nothing at all. My idea was to point out that our position was not a normal picnicking incident, but the result of an unfortunate mistake. Gregory's notion seemed to be to make it perfectly clear that it was I who had been driving the car.

The men did not smile. They examined the situation of the car with sympathetic curiosity.

"I expect it happens quite often," I said hopefully to Gregory. "In a county like this they are sure to have a special system for

Quaint Specimens

moving motor-cars off grass hummocks. It will be part of the elementary agricultural training round here."

Most probably I was right. The two men disappeared and came back after an absence of ten minutes with two long poles. We put them under the front axle of the car and heaved, two men to a pole, and heaved again. Very scientifically we heaved, with a sideways motion, to swing the nose of the car back again towards Norwich.

The heat was terrific. The poles creaked and splintered, but held firm.

"Some people will tell you," I panted to Gregory, "that there's no exercise in motoring."

Gregory grunted. We removed our coats. Even the natives perspired.

When we got her off, with a little thrill of excitement we all lay down and examined her underneath. There were scars but no wounds.

Gregory and I made a rapid estimate of the overtime rates for skilled agricultural labour in the county of Norfolk. It was accepted without a challenge. We got on

The Fan-Belt

board and started without difficulty to the accompaniment of a faint cheer.

"The curious thing about it is," said Gregory, after we had run about twenty miles or so, "that your engine seems to have stopped making a nuisance of itself."

"That reminds me," I said, and, stopping the car, I opened the bonnet. The fan-belt was still on. It never came off again.

"I have just discovered," said Gregory that evening, after looking at the map, "that if we'd held on up that lane for three miles more we could have run into our right road."

"Jolly lucky we didn't," I told him. "We should have never put the fan-belt right then."

**STUDIES OF STRANGE
LIVES**

TULLIUS

I DON'T know what made me pick up the "Via Latina." It was a very long time since I had read the book, rather longer than I cared to remember. But I had always been under the impression (I dare say you had too) that the hero of the story was Balbus. That is wrong. Balbus is a mere shadow or foil. What is more, when he was sixty-three years old, he was struck by lightning and died. That happens on page 143. Tullius lived on. Tullius is the hero of "Via Latina," and he is very like the heroes of the most modern kind of novel which you can get from the libraries to-day. A vast mass of apparently irrelevant statements and thoughts are poured upon the reader ; but they are not really irrelevant ; they are the subjective impressions of Tullius

Quaint Specimens

as they stream through his ordinary and his subliminal consciousness.

I may have got some of those last few words wrong. I don't care if I have. Anyhow, I am sure that Tullius was full of curious complexes, which "Via Latina" reveals. He was a mixture of strange impulses, good and bad. He was an unjust judge; he was ungrateful; yet "*we owe everything to Tullius, by whom our very life has been preserved.*" He is "*the excellent Tullius*" (twice); yet he "*neglected his children.*" He "*loved to walk by day.*" He was a celebrated painter. But he was a soldier too. "*We used to praise the conduct of the brave centurion, Tullius.*" That of course was during the war. The papers of the time were enthusiastic about him at first. "*What,*" they asked, "*prevents us from carrying on the war much more successfully, Tullius being now (jam) our leader (197, 5a) ?*" "*Tullius is guilty; let him not avoid punishment.*" Exposed, no doubt, by one of those fellows on the Staff.

"*Our men will build for you, O Tullius, (18), a*

Tullius

great house, that your friends may dwell in it." One knows that kind of house. "*There was no doubt that Tullius had formerly been rich, but was now very poor.*" He and his brother "*contemplated a great crime.*" Letting the west wing, I should imagine. "*He replied to those who accused him with indignation.*"

After that, I think, he dabbled in stocks : "*Tullius besought me to go the city with him.*" But, alas ! he had little luck. "*It requires (i.e. it is the part of) a very wise man to effect this task : for effecting (186) which Tullius has too-little ability.*" And so it goes on.

Carried away at last by the pathos and romance of it all, I began to feel that Tullius was too vast a figure for mere prose. What he needed was song : flower-like flaming words that should brand themselves on the imagination of the reader and make Tullius live for ever in our hearts and on our lips. So I wrote—

Quaint Specimens

THE SAGA OF TULLIUS

1

The sailor is-praising the waves ;
The keen and cruel lord
Overcomes the timid slaves
(With) violence and a sword.

2

The sailor escapes by running ;
The wretched Tullius fears
The constancy and the cunning
Of vigorous charioteers.

3

The pleasant scent of the flowers
Attracts the beautiful queen ;
The butterfly lives (for) few hours,
The leader is keen.

4

Tullius washes his daughter ;
Sharp frost destroys the pine ;
Many poets drink water,
Many (drink) wine.

5

The boy is not trained to obey ;
Dost thou, O Tullius,
(Being) ignorant of the way,
Point out the way to us ?

Tullius

6

Why, O most cruel of men,
Did you bind with so heavy a chain
The innocent Balbus ? Ten
(Of the) soldiers were slain.

7

Having driven away the cattle
There is no doubt that the kings
Will draw up their line of battle.
Praise (pl.) best (things).

8

The Germans, who were delaying
So long as the Gauls were slow,
Are within a little of paying
All the (quantum) money they owe.

9

Tullius will soon be present ;
There are some who think he errs :
Toil is not always pleasant
To artificers.

10

Scythians inhabit cold regions ;
Philosophers love toil, hate ease :
Tullius has led two legions
Across the Euphrates.

Quaint Specimens

ever held such a distinguished position before. He has certainly not been the cause of so much bitter dispute in this country since the day when he impeached Queen Guinevere at King Arthur's Court. The puzzle was arranged poetically, thus :

The third tall child of Lot and Belisant ^(5 D)

And that strange knight whom men called Lancelot's
son ^(20 A)

Rode on a winter morning three parts rain ^(14 A)

And two parts mist, ^(13 A) *and all a dreariness,*

Through a wan region ^(30 A) *of deserted woods*

Where half that fabled monster ^(6 D) *might have hid*

Who ravaged Lycia, or some wingless bird. ^(17 D)

And in their path they found a fallen dame

Decapitate, ^(32 A) *in fashionable clothes,*

Neck severed at the nape and seemingly

(So orb'd the lips in exclamation ^(11 A) *set,*

So rumpled was the headgear ^(27 D) *that she wore)*

The victim of some unprovoked attack

By craven knights ; not self-conferred the blow.

Whom, with one finger ^(12 A) *touching gingerly,*

As part in irritation, part in ire,

Sir Gareth's brother groan'd, " What have we here ? "

And, lifting, laid the corse upon his steed,

Lifeless, ^(19 D) *and bore it to the citadel,* ^(25 A)

But deemed the head too burdensome to bear.

Then Arthur called to him his Table Round

And girt upon his side Excalibur, ^(1 D)

Wherewith aforetime he was wont to smite ^(9 D)

The Knight Sir Agravaine

The heathen *Picts* ^(26 A) and quell *their uncouth cries*, ^(22 D)
So that at every *stroke* ^(15 A) they fled from him
Like *bearded grain* ^(7 D) before the winnowing fan.
And close beside him sat Queen Guinevere
With (Lancelot's gift) two *lap-dogs* ^(28 D) at her knee :
Fair as *that Grecian maiden* ^(22 A) for whose love
Her suitor set at naught the Hellespont.
A sweetness as of *essences of rose* ^(34 A)
Or frankincense beloved of *Indian maids* ^(31 D)
Hovered about the garments of the Queen,
Filling the room, no windows being ope :
And she half-slumbering *sat, deprived of T.* ^(33 A)
But Arthur : " This is a most dreadful thing.
Who can have done this deed ? No knight of mine.
Ye know the *rules* ^(6 A) I *fashioned* ^(17 A) and set down
When there was no rule save unruliness
And hatred of all rules : *amongst the rest* ^(4 D)
How that no knight (some mocked me for the *whim* ^(3 D))
Had leave to *cut off* ^(16 A) any lady's head
For spite or merriment, *though* ^(20 D) tempted sore,
On pain of being cast, *an abject thing*, ^(23 A)
For pyes to feed on in the wilderness
And screech his carrion *conduct* ^(21 A) through the world.
There is a name upon this damsel's brooch,
A damsel's name, ^(16 D) a name I will not tell
Save to that knight who shall avenge her doom.
But as for him who did the direful deed
His honour (*spelt as in Columbia*) ^(27 A) stands
Forfeit, and, though he were of mine own kin,
I would not (speaking in the Latin tongue) ^(29 D)
Spare him ; and this *Welsh wizard* ^(2 D) at my side
Agrees with his *Commanding Officer*. ^(25 D)
Who then will *fasten* ^(28 A) on his *coat of mail* ^(18 D)

Quaint Specimens

The brooch and, fastening, undertake the quest ? ”
Fell then a space of silence in the hall
So deep that all men fancied, “ If a pin
Dropped in this silence we should hear the pin.”
And——^(13 D) face was seen to wreath in scorn,
And——^(13 D) lips were heard to murmur “ *Trash !* ” ^(35 D)
Till suddenly Sir Bors, grown huge of *limb*,^(37 A)
And now for some time past a *Rechabite* ^(36 D)
Through converse with a *notable divine*,^(8 D)
Sprang to his feet and shouted clarion clear
Up to the sixth note of the *tonic scale*,^(1 A)
“ The quest to me, Sir King ! The quest to me ! ”
And Arthur answered him, “ *All right*, ^(24 A) go on,”
And gave the brooch and passed from out the hall.

The friction arose because I called Agravaïne
“ the third tall child of Lot and Belisant.”
This definition is not strictly accurate. I
feel now that the public ought to know a little
more about the life and character of the man.
Tennyson, who does not mention him, defines
his brother, Sir Gareth, as “ the last tall
son of Lot and Belisant.” Sir Thomas
Malory, on whom we have to rely for the
details of Sir Agravaïne’s life, says that King
Lot’s wife was Morgause. Sometimes he
describes her as Mawgawse. Sir Thomas
Malory could never have made cross-word

The Knight Sir Agravaine

puzzles. His spelling was not good enough. I don't know where Tennyson got Queen Belisant from; possibly from Geoffrey of Monmouth. Geoffrey of Monmouth, according to a contemporary, who should not have talked of a fellow-clergyman in that tone, "lied saucily and shamelessly." Perhaps he deceived Lord Tennyson with a lie about Belisant.

In any case, King Lot and his wife had five sons—if we may trust Sir Thomas Malory—of whom the eldest was certainly Gawaine, and the two youngest certainly Gareth and Modred. Gaheris and Agravaine came in between. Whether Sir Agravaine was older than Sir Gaheris must always remain, I fear, a moot point until the records of the Kingdom of Orkney are properly searched. Gaheris for a long time acted as a squire to Gawaine, and on one occasion, when Gawaine smote off a lady's head—by misadventure—

"Alas!" said Gaheris, "that is foul and shamefully done! That shame shall never from you."

Quaint Specimens

From which it may be argued that he was young and impressionable, for accidents are bound to occur. Sir Agravaine, whether younger than Sir Gaheris or not, never seemed to be impressed by deaths. He was a soured and melancholy man. On the other hand, he married Dame Laurel, who was a niece of Gaheris's wife, Linet. This is what makes me think he was younger than Gaheris. Gaheris took the wealthy aunt and handed his younger brother the impecunious niece. There was never a knight, I think, who was so consistently defeated in every kind of tourney and joust as Sir Agravaine, and that without even putting up a decent kind of fight. He never rode his horse at a great wallop at anybody, nor carved cantels out of their shields, or smote them so their heads were all to-brast. No tracing and traversing, no feutring and foining for him. He never during a single duel waxed strong from nine o'clock in the morning till midday, or felt his powers beginning to wane during the afternoon. He never lasted anything like so long. It was a favourite

The Knight Sir Agravaine

exercise of Lamorak, Tristram and Lancelot to unhorse him, a mere name, in the middle of two other knights.

He was not present when Sir Gaheris killed Morgause, his mother, taking her by the hair and striking off her head because she was indulging in an amour with Sir Lamorak. It was unlike Agravaine not to have been there, egging Sir Gaheris on. Sir Gawaine was angry that his mother had been killed, but it is not even stated whether Sir Agravaine was pleased or annoyed. He joined in the subsequent murder of Sir Lamorak and other persons, but his main preoccupation seems to have been to talk openly about the relations between Sir Lancelot and Queen Guinevere,

“For he was ever open-mouthed.”

Possibly it was this facial characteristic that made him such an easy target in the tournaments. I am beginning to see him already as the hero of a modern play. If I ever write a play it shall be about Sir Agravaine.

Almost the only pleasant scene in which he

Quaint Specimens

figures is that when Queen Guinevere "called unto her knights of the Table Round, and she gave them warning that early upon the morrow she would ride on maying into woods and fields beside Westminster." Sir Agravaine was there. On that occasion he must have been well horsed and clothed in green, either silk or cloth, and been all bedashed with herbs, mosses and flowers in the best manner and the freshest. Afterwards, when Sir Meliagrance attacked the party with an eight-score men well harnessed, Sir Agravaine helped to defend the maying ladies and had his usual luck. He was smitten to the earth with a grimly wound.

From that field he was carried with the rest of Queen Guinevere's wounded knights, some sitting, some overthwart their horses, that it was a pity to behold them, to the castle of Sir Meliagrance. The Queen insisted upon having all the knights, together with her ladies, in her own chamber, partly for fear of Sir Meliagrance and partly that she might tend their hurts. In the middle of the night

The Knight Sir Agravaine

Sir Lancelot arrived at the castle in haste. He reached it in a wood-cutter's chariot, because his horse, which he had previously swum over the Thames from Westminster to Lambeth, was wounded, having more than forty arrows broad and rough shot into him from a bushment and being also disembowelled. These things take the spirit out of a horse. Sir Lancelot brast the iron bars of the window clean out of the stone walls with his hands ; but unfortunately one of the iron bars cut the brawn of his hands throughout to the bone, which caused the blood to flow from them very considerably in the Queen's room and aroused the suspicions of Sir Meliagrance. I think this is the incident rather inadequately treated by William Morris in " The Defence of Queen Guinevere."

Sir Agravaine, who, as I say, was in the room, must have been very badly wounded or he would certainly have noticed this incident and brought it up afterwards when dramatically, in the twentieth book, he blew the gaff to the King.

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It was then the month of May, when everything flourisheth and burgeoneth, and Agravaine's revelations were not well received. Sir Gawaine refused to have anything to do with them, and Arthur himself was annoyed. However, he consented to let a trap be laid for the Queen. Agravaine naturally formed part of the trap. There must have been a strain of dogged pertinacity about the man. He must have guessed that he would get what was coming to him, and get it he did. Sir Lancelot set all open the chamber door, and mightily and knightly he strode in amongst them, and anon at the first buffet he slew Sir Agravaine. One buffet, you will observe.

But mark this. Nowhere can I find that Sir Agravaine himself transgressed what I may call the Tennysonian code of morals. He married Dame Laurel, as I said, and it is my belief that he made a good husband and a good father. Sir Thomas Malory says nothing against his domestic life, and Sir Thomas Malory was no reticent biographer. He was a Lytton Strachey rather than a

The Knight Sir Agravaine

Sidney Lee. Through all the miserable passages of his career, borne over the crupper or pulled flatling to the ground, his helm rashed off and himself rustled to the earth, Agravaine, I think, kept before him this high standard of family life, and the thing that he hated most was the conduct of Queen Guinevere. It seems a pity that he was not able to see her brought out to be burnt in her shift at Carlisle. He would certainly have been killed then, as Gareth and Gaheris, his brothers, were killed by Sir Lancelot, who thrang hither and thither and smote through their brain-pans ; but he would have felt, I think, with the last flash in his brain-pan that his life had not been lived in vain. As it was, he had few consolations. For he could not know that I was going to put him into a cross-word puzzle—and that, too, in Tennysonian blank verse.

THEATRICAL NOTES

A FAULT IN MODERN DRAMA

ONE of the reasons why modern plays are so often held to be immoral is to be found in the decay of symbolism.

It is, of course, absolutely impossible to write an immoral serious play. It would be very nearly as easy to make a horse moo. With farce and low comedy the matter is obviously different; but I take it that the present complaints are being lodged very largely against plays which pretend to be serious. You will see in a moment that such plays are obliged to be moral.

Supposing that you put the Devil on the stage and attempted to make out that he was rather a fine fellow—as indeed he appears to be in “Paradise Lost”—and then began to think of something very diabolical to make him do,

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such as bullying a helpless woman or maltreating a child. Your play would immediately be in the soup. Not only would the audience reject the Devil as a hero, giving vent to loud cat-calls, but what is most serious, since there is no need and very often no hot demand that the play should be produced, you would reject him yourself.

The difficulty with many modern plays is that the authors, in their cleverness and subtlety, like to leave the morals implicit. They like to give us what is called "a slice of life," and leave us to work out for ourselves whether it is fate or heredity, or the evil conditions of contemporary society, or what not, that is doing the mischief. They will not have a chorus, nor introduce the figure of Fate, nor allow the characters themselves to moralize. Or, if they are allowed to moralize, they are not allowed to draw the obvious conclusions. All this, as I am reminded by seeing a good old play of Ibsen's again, can be avoided by the discreet use of symbolism.

Let us take an ordinary domestic instance.

A Fault in Modern Drama

The dog has run out of the front door and escaped on to the common, while the cook or the kitchenmaid is cleaning the front-door steps. The play opens at this point. A husband and wife are conversing.

She. I thought I heard something howling.

He. It is the dog. It ran away and I beat it when it came back again.

She (walking across the stage and speaking very intensely). Ah, it ran away!

We now know already that there is something more in the dog's running away than meets the eye.

She. Where did the dog go to?

He. Out on to the common.

She (intensely again). Ah! The common. . . .

We now perceive that the common represents symbolically the free and open life for which all captive creatures are pining in vain.

She (continuing). Where is the dog now?

He. I have tied him up by his chain to his basket.

She (walking to one end of the stage). His

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chain! (*Walking to the other side of the stage.*)
To his basket!

The whole audience is now convinced that the dog's chain represents the chain of conventional but false propriety which prevents the wife from running away from her husband, and that the basket of the dog represents life or fate or circumstance, or else that the dog's basket represents conventional morality, and the dog's chain represents fate. It really does not matter which. If the play is a play in the manner of Ibsen, it will very soon transpire that the husband had been carrying on with the kitchenmaid.

It is not at all difficult to introduce any symbols you please into a drama. And how convenient they are! If Ibsen can make us believe, as he does in "The Wild Duck," that a family may have a large garret full of old furniture and populated by rabbits and poultry, representing to the bemused mind of a drunken old man the free life of the forest where he used to go shooting when he was young, there is no need to be shy in the matter of symbolism.

A Fault in Modern Drama

Supposing, for instance, that you have written a play called "Carpet Sweeping," which is full of latent moral purpose ; what could be more useful than to have a vacuum-cleaner constantly present on the stage ? Never mind how it got there and why it's not taken away. That can be the subject of the quarrel between the husband and the wife. The great point is to have it there.

He. What is that extraordinary thing in the corner ?

She. It is a vacuum-cleaner.

He. What is it for ?

She. To suck the dust out of the carpet.

He (very intensely). Ha . . . The dust . . . Out of the carpet !

He can say more if you like. But whether he chooses to elaborate the notion or not we shall be forced to remember that the lives of men and women are too often like carpets. They become dusty ; they have to be cleaned. Every now and then somebody in the cast can stumble over the vacuum-cleaner or allude to it for some reason or other. And it will be

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rather a great moment at the end when the master or mistress rings the bell and says to the parlourmaid, "Mary, I want you to take away the vacuum-cleaner."

Or you may have written a play called "The Maelstrom," in which a number of dissipated and degenerate-looking people drink cocktails. The cocktail gives a great opening for symbolism. It may be made of gin and two kinds of vermouth, which represents the mixed notions of right and wrong which prevail in a frivolous society. It may have a cherry inside it, perforated by a little stick. Much may be done with that cherry.

He (holding the cherry up on its little stick).
Do you see what this is?

She. Yes, it is a cherry.

He. A bottled cherry.

She. Yes, bottled in maraschino. What a beautiful colour it is!

He. Out in the wood there are wild cherries. They ripen in the sun.

She. Yes, but the birds peck them—and they are not so sweet as this one.

A Fault in Modern Drama

He (intensely). Some of them, perhaps, escape the birds and have their hearts taken out of them with knives and are imprisoned in glass. They become soaked in artificial sweetness and are transfixed by a piece of wood. Then they are placed in cocktails, and we take them out and eat them—so.

She. How strangely you speak !

Indeed he does. The fact is that he would not be tolerated in any ordinary drawing-room or hotel lounge after making an idiotic little speech like that, when he ought to have said something wickedly epigrammatic and wise. But it all helps the drama tremendously, for both of them, to be sure, are leading bottled and artificial lives.

Or, once again, your drama may be entitled "Stumbling Seraphim." You present in it the spectacle, not edifying in itself, of two women gradually getting drunk on champagne. The very title shows that you disapprove of this unpleasant orgy, but it is well that the audience should bear your disapproval in mind. This effect will be obtained by a

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picture of two angels which falls at the psychological moment owing to the rotting of the cord, or a statuette which is brushed accidentally off the mantelpiece, or, better still, by use of a book which has the word "angel" in the title. Thus :—

First Lady. Have you been reading this book ?

Second Lady. Yes, I often read books. What is it called ?

First Lady. "Ministering Angels."

Second Lady. Oh ! (*Lets it fall from her hand.*) There—I have dropped it.

First Lady. How clumsy you are, dearie !

The point is that when there is plenty of this kind of thing in a play the audience is perpetually reminded of the moral, and comes away full of uplift, whereas, if they are left to draw their own conclusions, as they not infrequently are in a modern play, their stupidity may cause them to remember the unpleasant incident and forget the underlying moral. As I said before, almost any object cleverly introduced and perpetually dragged in will make a

A Fault in Modern Drama

satisfying symbol—a canary in a cage, a door that will not shut, a piece of mud on the shirt-front, a waste-paper basket, a mouldy banana or pear. . . .

MY OWN IDEA OF A GOOD PLAY

I HAD no sooner read the appeal for funds made by the Marlowe Memorial Committee than I began to project a fantastical masque to be performed at Canterbury, the poet's native town, where the unfinished memorial stands. I had not the courage to submit a synopsis of this masque to Sir Edmund Gosse, Sir Sidney Lee and the other members of the Committee, nor to express a hope that it might be found possible to produce it later during the Canterbury Cricket Week. I therefore do so here. Of Kit Marlowe's life, of course, very little is known. Beyond the facts that he was educated at King's School, Canterbury, and Cambridge, was accused of being a coiner, an atheist and a blasphemer, lived dissolutely and was killed in a drunken

My Own Idea of a Good Play

brawl over a tavern-wench at Deptford, being then twenty-six years of age, we are almost in the dark. Of the fine, if flamboyant, nature of his poetry we are in no doubt at all.

But a public that dotes on topical sensations needs something more moving than admiration of a dead poet's work if it is to open its purse. What is wanted is to make the past and the present live side by side. Hence my allegorical play. We have a very strong list of characters, including :

The ninety-four Archbishops of Canterbury,
headed by St. Augustine in full canonical
dress, with chaplains and croziers complete.

Geoffrey Chaucer.

William Shakespeare.

Ben Jonson.

George Chapman.

Kit Marlowe.

Helen of Troy.

The present Mayor of Canterbury.

Five former dittos.

Queen Elizabeth.

Tamburlaine the Great.

Dr. Faustus.

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The Headmaster of King's School, Canterbury.

Master Bame, an informer.

Beelzebub.

Mephistopheles.

Ovid.

Hero.

Sir Edmund Gosse.

Leander.

Sir Sidney Lee.

The Bishop of Durham.

The General Manager of the Southern Railway.

Miss Edith Sitwell.

Sir Edward Marshall-Hall.

Sir Ellis Hume-Williams

and

The Goddess of Fame.

(Together with students, merry-makers, Canterbury pilgrims, choristers, devils, Huguenots, theologians, Kings of Asia, literary critics, pothouse brawlers, tavern wenches, muses, actors, dramatists and poets of yesterday and to-day.)

After the usual prologue in blank verse, spoken by the Goddess of Fame, and a medi-

My Own Idea of a Good Play

aeval street scene with morris-dancing, there is enacted a short open-air version of the murder of Thomas à Becket, followed by the arrival of Chaucer and the pilgrims of the "Canterbury Tales." When these have passed we see Marlowe seated on a bench at a wooden table carousing with Helen of Troy. He has a cup of sack in one hand and a dagger in the other. He is chanting to her in a somewhat maudlin fashion his well-known poem beginning :

"Come, liue with me and be my loue,
And we will all the pleasures proue
That vallies, groues, hills and fieldes,
Woods, or steepie mountaine yieldes,"

of which the spelling is more his than mine. He is interrupted by the entrance of the innkeeper, who demands payment of his bill. Marlowe flings him a gold coin. The innkeeper declares it to be a forgery. Marlowe stabs him.

We now have a very dramatic little scene. Enter slowly (to a solemn musick) the ninety-four Archbishops of Canterbury, who begin to remonstrate with the poet. I flatter myself

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that this is a thoroughly Elizabethan effect.

Marlowe flings back taunt for taunt.

“Holla, ye pampered jades of Cantuar,
What do ye draw in stipend anyway?”

is one of his embittered openings; and to Thomas à Becket in particular:

“Was this the face that launched a thousand trips
Along the Pilgrim’s Way to Faversham?”

I do not feel very certain that the Pilgrim’s Way to Canterbury does run via Faversham, but the South-Eastern Railway route does, and a very tedious journey it can be. The Archbishops grow more and more angry. Marlowe continues to carouse and sing. Shakespeare, Ben Jonson and Chapman rush forward to intercede. Marlowe chases them all away with his dagger, accusing Shakespeare of having made “Pistol” parody him, Ben Jonson of writing piffling comedies, and Chapman of having completely ruined “Hero and Leander” by finishing the poem for him.

Hell opens, revealing Mephistopheles, etc.
This is always a good stage device, though a

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little difficult to introduce into a piece of open-air pageantry. It will probably need the co-operation of the Mayor and Town Council. The Archbishops attempt to thrust Marlowe and Helen of Troy into the chasm with their croziers. Marlowe is stung to greater fury than ever. In a renewed access of rage he stabs the ninety-four Archbishops. *They fall.* It may seem a little bold to make a character stab as many as ninety-four Archbishops in a single Act, and it may be objected that one at least of them has been stabbed already ; but we must remember the poet's irascible temperament and the vigorous custom of the Elizabethan stage (compare in particular Marlowe's own "Massacre at Paris," where the stage direction "*stabs him*" occurs about every ten lines). These considerations, coupled with the fact that ours is a fantastical play, provide ample excuse for the incident.

Lucifer (or Beelzebub) now comes boldly forward and claims Kit Marlowe for his own. Dr. Faustus urges him to go quietly. He is just about to be removed when Tamburlaine

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the Great, supported by Hazlitt, Charles Lamb, Sir Edmund Gosse and Sir Sidney Lee, drives on in a chariot pulled by four Kings of Asia (with two in reserve). They claim Marlowe's spirit for Posterity and appeal to the Goddess of Fame. *Fame descends from the sky on a golden throne.* This will also need careful management. We may be obliged to make use of a crane. A long tussle ensues, devils pulling Marlowe one way, Tamburlaine, Gosse, etc., the other. Confusion reigns in the streets. Students, burghers and theologians quarrel. Kings of Asia prance and curvet. Helen weeps. Hero and Leander roam restlessly about. Ovid looks bored.

This ends the first part of the pageant.

The second part I can summarize much more briefly. In deference to the modern idea of sensation (as opposed to the Elizabethan) it consists of a long legal dispute as to Marlowe's claim for a permanent memorial at Canterbury. It appears that Sir Ellis Hume-Williams has been briefed by the claimant, and Sir Edward Marshall-Hall by the Dean and Chapter.

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Evidence is given of Marlowe's profligate life and the actual circumstances of his death. Mr. Bame, the informer, testifies to his alleged unorthodoxy ; Chaucer, Shakespeare and Miss Edith Sitwell are examined on the practice of poetry, and the Bishop of Durham on the necessary minimum of belief in the pre- and post-Reformation Churches and amongst Modernist thinkers of to-day. Ovid gives the Court his views on love, Tamburlaine on the effects of sudden irritation, Sir Sidney Lee on eulogy, Dr. Faustus on the precise nature of eternal fire, and Queen Elizabeth on the relative social status of poets and Archbishops of Canterbury in her own day.

Sir Edward Marshall-Hall lashes himself to fury over the poet's contemptible life, his misdeeds and the bombastic nature of his verse, which he quotes extensively in a voice of withering scorn. Sir Ellis Hume-Williams points out that there is no immoral lesson to be drawn from any of the plays, and quotes all the passages over again in a voice of melodious veneration. He reads out also the first two

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sestiaads of "Hero and Leander," reminding the jury of the written affidavit made by Taylor the Water-Poet that scullers used to chant its couplets as they rowed along the Thames, and to the evidence of the General Manager of the Southern Railway that guards and porters on the South-Eastern line have preserved the same custom up to the present time.

Fame sums up. The jury retires. The verdict for the poet is eventually given., Towns-men, students, etc., rejoice; theologians scowl; saxophones are heard. Sir Edmund Gosse and Sir Sidney Lee drive from the court in Tamburlaine's chariot, holding aloft the works of Marlowe. The Kings of Asia are unharnessed by enthusiastic citizens, and the chariot is drawn triumphant through the streets by six full-robed mayors. There would be a collection, of course.

ADVERTISING SHAKESPEARE

AN eminent business man recently informed the old Playgoers' Club that Shakespeare could easily be made popular if he were only advertised, and he suggested the use of the Shakespeare Memorial Fund for the purpose. Encouraged by him, I went into the matter thoroughly, and drew up the following scheme. It will be seen that the plan which commended itself to me as the most businesslike was not to confine the advertisement to the plays of Shakespeare alone, but to invite the manufacturers of other articles to "come in," as the saying goes. I did not feel certain that the Shakespeare Memorial Fund by itself would be sufficient for a thoroughly extensive advertising campaign, and I proposed, therefore, to adopt the more economical method of kill-

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ing as many birds as possible with one stone.

Thus :

LET MR. SHAKESPEARE HOLD YOUR HEARTH.

SHAKESPEARE is the best-value-for-money poet in the whole world. Whenever discriminating men and women are gathered together, the word "Shakespeare" is sure to be on every lip. The exclusive critic, MATTHEW ARNOLD, said of SHAKESPEARE :

"Others abide our question, thou art free."

CULTURE PAYS

MILTON wrote :

"Or sweetest Shakespeare, Fancy's child,
Warble his native woodnotes wild."

NEXT SUNDAY Will Be ROBIN SUNDAY At

PONDERS END

TRAVEL BY UNDERGROUND

MILTON *knew*.

There are many more beautiful quotations in Shakespeare than in any other English book except the Bible. Think for a moment of the following :

Advertising Shakespeare

. . . WHENEVER You Are Run
Over By A MOTOR-CAR
REMEMBER PERICLES of TYRE

“ Full fathom five thy father lies ;
Of his bones are coral made ;
Those are pearls that were his eyes ;
Nothing of him that doth fade
But doth suffer a sea-change
Into something rich and strange.”

EXPERTS CANNOT TELL
BINGO PEARLS
FROM THE RAREST
TREASURES OF THE DEEP

Or this :

“ Not all the water in the rough rude sea
Can wash the balm off from an anointed king.’

USE FIXIT POMATUM
As Supplied to the
CROWNED HEADS OF EUROPE

Or this :

“ To-morrow, and to-morrow, and to-morrow
Creeps in this petty pace from day to day
To the last syllable of recorded time ;
And all our yesterdays have lighted fools

USE MOSRAM LAMPS

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The way to dusty death. Out, out, brief candle !
Life's but a walking shadow, a poor player
That struts and frets his hour upon the stage

HAVE YOU BEEN TO "LONDON BAWLING" ?

And then is heard no more ; it is a tale
Told by an idiot, full of sound and fury,
Signifying nothing."

READ SHAKESPEARE IN YOUR BATH

SHAKESPEARE had the broadest mind, the most humane outlook, the most sympathetic intelligence of all the poets who have ever lived. He makes an essential appeal to the ordinary man who has a natural taste for refinement in literature, whether he be statesman, student, stock-broker, managing director or clerk. SHAKESPEARE knew men. He understood their troubles and their cares.

WHY SUFFER MISERIES THROUGH

neurasthenia, morbid fears, grave disease, chronic gastritis, chronic gout, blushing, inability to eat, think, drink, sleep, get up in the morning or go to bed at night, when by a simple, gentle

Advertising Shakespeare

YET THOROUGHLY RELIABLE SYSTEMATIC TREATMENT

as Hamlet said :

“ You can take arms against a sea of troubles
And by opposing, end them ” ?

A FEW LINES OF SHAKESPEARE AND
A SPOONFUL OF GUSCHEM SALTS in your
morning cup of tea make all the difference between
GLOOM and JOY.

NOW IS THE TIME TO READ SHAKESPEARE

SHAKESPEARE understood domestic life.

“ Nay, this my hand will rather
The multitudinous seas incarnadine,
Making the green one red.”

HOUSEWIVES ! HOUSEWIVES !!

HOUSEWIVES !!!

GET SWINK'S DYES

SHAKESPEARE was a business man.

“ The cloud-capped towers, the gorgeous palaces,
The solemn temples, the great globe itself,
Yea, all which it inherit, shall dissolve,

IS *YOUR* HOUSE INSURED YET ?

And like this insubstantial pageant faded,
Leave not a rack behind.”

Quaint Specimens

WHENEVER YOU GO TO A PUBLIC DINNER
THINK OF TITUS ANDRONICUS

SHAKESPEARE shows the most exquisite sympathy with grief.

“ I might have saved her ; now she's gone for ever !
Cordelia, Cordelia ! stay a little. Ha !
What is't thou say'st ? Her voice was ever soft,
Gentle and low, an excellent thing in woman,
I kill'd the slave that was a-hanging thee.”

HI ! HI ! STOP THE BAND !
A LADY HAS DROPPED HER SUSPENDER !

Use the Tatler Suspender with the
Rhomboid Button

SHAKESPEARE was above all things a patriot.

“ This other Eden, demi-paradise,
This fortress built by Nature for herself
Against infection and the hand of war,
This happy breed of men, this little world,
This precious stone set in the silver sea,

HAVE YOU BOUGHT HER THAT RING
YET ?

Which serves it in the office of a wall
Or as a moat defensive to a house,
Against the envy of less happier lands,
This blessed plot, this earth, this realm,
this England. . . .

Advertising Shakespeare

**15 MILLION SATISFIED USERS
TESTIFY TO THE TONIC QUALITIES
OF SHAKESPEARE ON THE MIND**

England, bound in with the triumphant sea,
Whose rocky shore beats back the envious siege
Of watery Neptune, is now bound in with shame,
With inky blots and rotten parchment bonds."

**THE
NONONO
PEN
NEVER
LEAKS!**

SHAKESPEARE builds bonnie babies. Mothers,
read SHAKESPEARE to your children. The best
easy-furnishing brain plan in the world.

**EVERYBODY IS READING SHAKESPEARE
DON'T GET LEFT OUT!**

A FEW GOOD BOOKS

PERSONALITY

I WAS simply trying to acquire personality, and if they were so foolish as to show the Vicar straight through into the garden when my back was turned, I cannot help it; and that is all there is to say about the matter.

I was trying to acquire personality because of a little book, a little American book, which I had been reading, where it was pointed out how essential to success personality is in order to develop our talents in that state of life to which we may happen to be called. I should have thought the Vicar would have understood and sympathized with a thing like that.

There seemed to be a great deal to learn. I must say some of it was fairly easy.

“A man’s neckwear,” the book said, “re-

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flects his personality to a marked degree. An elderly clubman of ancient family whose hair is white invariably wears a dull red tie. How distinguished he looks! . . . Another elderly clubman wears distinctive ties, although they express a somewhat different idea. He prefers a stock in dark soft colours. His tie marks him as a refined old aristocrat, which he is."

I got a stock in dark soft colours and I got a dull red tie too. I wore them on alternate days. I also wore light, loose and porous clothes, which the book said were necessary if one wanted to obtain personality. It also said, "Sleep out if you can." I couldn't because of the vagrancy laws. But I slept in as often as I could. It also said, "Breathe deeply." I did that. I used to do it during the sermons on Sunday mornings. I also took a good deal of relaxation and recreation. The book was very strong about these.

There were, however, one or two rather more complicated instructions. Freedom of motion seemed to be important to personality, and

Personality

“the first rudiment of freedom of motion,” said the book, “is a good walk.”

It appeared that Miss Berthe Brageotti, the professional dancer, had given some excellent advice to those who would walk well. “Caress the ground with your feet when you walk,” she had said, and I did a good deal of that. “If your walk is awkward,” went on the book, “practise the following exercise suggested by Miss Brageotti: Find a straight line in the pattern of your rug or in the boards of the floor, or lay a piece of string. Stand with your feet on the line, the left one a few inches in front of the right. Let your weight be evenly divided between the balls of your feet with your knees slightly flexed.

“Lift the right foot from the ground, raising the heel first, till only the toe touches. Then drag it lightly to the position of two inches in front of the left foot on the line, placing the toe down first. As the weight shifts from the toe to the ball of this forward foot (the right foot) raise the heel of the rear foot (the left foot) until the weight is on the toe, and then in

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turn place that foot in front of the forward foot."

I made a habit of doing this whilst passing right down the car on the Underground Railway, and I came to the conclusion that if I had had a few more feet I should soon have been able to walk rather well.

"Nerve-tension," said the book, "with some people is a chronic state." I felt sure that I had it. To obtain personality it was apparently necessary to eliminate nerve-tension. The book recommended:—

"Sit with your feet and legs apart; drop your hands between the legs so that your finger-tips almost touch the floor; let your head and torso fall forward so that your head is in a line with your knees. Draw your shoulders forward, narrowing the chest and bulging out the back as in a slow but strong shrug. You will feel a pull on your spine and your neck muscles. Let yourself become as limp as possible. Close your eyes and stop thinking. Stay in this position for a few minutes at a time."

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I practised this also on the Underground Railway, although I am not one, as a rule, for letting my torso fall forward without restraint in public vehicles. I also, but chiefly in the bathroom, practised the exercise of "hopping around once on one foot, then on the other, with the whole body, head, arms, hands and legs as limp as those of a rag-doll." The only difficulty I found here was to keep the leg on which the operation of hopping was actually taking place sufficiently limp. I think I should have got more personality if I had not hopped inadvertently one morning on the soap.

After that I learned

HOW TO ENTER A ROOM

"Before entering a room," said the book, "pause for a moment. Forget your hands, your face, your clothes. Concentrate your sense of movement in that vital centre termed the solar plexus. Feel lifted up by it, thus freeing your shoulders, neck and limbs. Then think of the place in the room you are going to, and go straight for it. For you nothing

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else in the room exists. First of all you will probably wish to speak to your hostess." If I upset Lady Titterton's iced coffee on to her gown at my Aunt Emilia's reception, that was simply because I was fast becoming a personality, as I tried to explain afterwards. And anyhow coffee is quite frequently used for dyeing lace.

It was in studying the last part of the book that the awkward incident with the Vicar occurred. The last part of the book dealt with the importance to personality of attractive speech, of cultivating a pleasing voice and a musical cultured laugh. I knew I had not got these things and I wanted to be strong on them. The voice-training was not arduous, though it occasioned a little surprise amongst people who did not exactly know what I was doing.

"Every now and then," said the book, "give some exclamation, such as 'Fire ! Fire !' or 'Help ! Help ! Help !' and feel your body and breath and throat prepare for the tone immediately before you give it. Practise,"

Personality

it also said, "reading the following passage from Dickens, making your exclamations as large and as open as possible :

" ' Yo ho ! past hedges and gates and trees, past cottages and barns and people going home from work. Yo ho ! . . . Yo ho ! down the pebbly dip and through the merry water splash, and up at canter to the level road again. Yo ho ! Yo ho ! ' "

" Shout out ' Yo ho ! ' as the big hearty coachman would shout it. Keep in mind those conditions which you should sustain."

I tried to. It made the suburb ring a little, but there were no very serious complaints. After all, as I pointed out to the policeman, one of my neighbours keeps a gramophone and several of them have noisy dogs. It was when I was practising laughter, and, as I say, in my own garden in front of a large bed of delphiniums, that I seem unwittingly to have caused offence to the Anglican Church.

" If your laughter," said the book, " seems forced or self-conscious, it is suggested that

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you memorize the following poem by Michael Field, and as you say it dance with your feet, arms, head and your whole body. Let your laughter come as spontaneously as possible :

“ ‘THE DANCERS.

“ ‘ I dance, ha ! ha ! ha ! I dance and sing,
Above my head my arms I swing.
Ho ! ho ! ho ! see another faun,
A black one, dances on the lawn !
He moves with me, and when I lift
My heels, his feet directly shift ;
I can't out-dance him, though I try ;
He dances nimbler far than I.
I toss my head and so does he ;
What tricks he dares to play on me !
I touch the ivy in my hair,
Ivy he has and fingers there ;
The spiteful thing to mock me so !
I will out-dance him, ho ! ho ! ho ! ’ ”

That is all that I was doing, and I had already got to the words “ Ho ! ho ! ho ! ” before I caught my first glimpse of the Vicar. He went away without saying a single word, and since then seems to have been going all over the parish saying ridiculous things about me, especially to Lady Titterton.

Personality

Why a person should not be able to acquire personality simply and naturally in a London suburb without all this backbiting I cannot for the life of me understand.

A BOOK OF ETIQUETTE

“ *Annoyance*, at under-housemaid’s impertinence, how to express.—*Best Man*, suitability of asking bride’s former husband to be.—*Blackmail*, how to levy without infringing the law.—*Divorce*, collusive arrangements in connection with.—*Old Bailey*, behaviour in.—*Pride*, when to swallow.—*Night Clubs*, use of false names for.—*Roulette*, what to do when ruined at.—*Washing* linen, dirty of before the world.—”

NO, no. You are far too sanguine. Idly glancing through the index in front of me I can find for you no sensational headings like these. Whatever the old ladies in their drawing-rooms and the old gentlemen in their clubs may say about it, polite behaviour has altered very little since the dear old Edwardian days.

Archbishops, addressing.—*Asparagus*, correct way of eating.—*Baby’s* arrival, announcing.—

A Book of Etiquette

Engagements, clandestine, drifting into, interview with fiancée's parents.—*Finger bowls*.—*Introductions*, dancing without.—*Oysters*, to eat.—*Royalty*, contact with.—*Unpretentious* entertaining.—*Soup*, correct way to take.—"

They are all there, as they used to be, and the parvenu of 1925 has but little more to learn than he had twenty years ago. Possibly, indeed, less, for

Under varying circumstances, custom has made the rules of certain sets or cliques comfortably elastic,

and

Society itself is frequently guilty of disregarding many of the rules of etiquette, such as are set forth in this book, especially the more superficial ones.

It will not be well, however, to presume too greatly upon this.

Between those already established within the *charmed circle* there is a *cameraderie* which permits much that would cause a new-comer to be looked at askance. It is only a familiar, assured standard in any grade of society that allows the taking of any liberties with its own particular social customs.

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Too true. Let us not forget, then, that it is still impolite "to collect condiments, butter, cake, biscuits, etc., round your own plate, rather than, after helping yourself, to put them where they may be reached by others." Correct dress for a bridegroom is still a morning coat, trousers with a pin stripe, a grey tie, silk hat, white spats and grey gloves, and a white buttonhole. When upon a visit to the house of a bachelor or a widower, a young married lady should still be accompanied by her husband or some married lady friend who may be considered a sufficient chaperone; and when there whitebait, if served, should be eaten whole, for to cut off all the tiny heads and tails would be a tedious process. When dinner has been finished she will rinse her fingers daintily in the finger-bowl, one hand at a time, and only the finger-tips, then lightly dry them on the table napkin, which is afterwards bunched up tidily and laid on the table.

The proper pronunciation of family surnames remains, as of old, inexorable. Des Vaux is

A Book of Etiquette

still pronounced Deveu, and Mainwaring Mannering. A Foljambe is a Fooljum still. On public occasions Masters in Chancery continue to precede Masters in Lunacy, and Masters in Lunacy members of the Fourth Class of the Royal Victorian Order, each after their kind. The younger sons of peers' younger sons walk before baronets' younger sons, and before the younger sons of knights, and all of them enter the banqueting chamber in advance of Doctors in Divinity, Doctors in Medicine, and Doctors in Law.

The bones of game must not be strenuously attacked or scraped, and, of course, no matter how great the temptation, chicken or game bones must never be lifted to the mouth or put aside on to another plate. It is better to say "He gave me a rose" than "He give me a rose," and "She took it from me" than "She took it off of me." (Personally, I rather like "He give me a rose." There seems to be more pathos about it; but it will not do for the resolute *arriviste*.)

On the whole, I should say that our authoress

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is a safe guide. But I must except the matter of Jerusalem artichokes.

“The most generally recognized way of eating Jerusalem artichokes,” she says, “is to lift the leaves to the mouth on a fork and press the meaty part and juice from them with the teeth, discarding the leaves by means of the fork, and laying them at the side of the plate.”

That is an error. Jerusalem artichokes have no leaves. They are those white oblong things cut with facets, and mercifully concealed in white sauce. It would be a great breach of etiquette to try pressing the meaty part and juice from them with the teeth, and discarding the rest. It is one of the things that are simply not done, however charmed the circle, however much “cameraderie” may prevail.

TRUTH

WRITERS of literary reviews have a habit of talking about "bed books." Some of them, I gather, put Gibbon's "Decline and Fall" beside their pillow; others Voltaire or Verlaine. At least they say they do. There are few subjects on which a literary critic can write with less fear of contradiction. After all, nobody knows except the servants. But there has recently drifted into my house the third edition of Mr. A. S. E. Ackermann's "Popular Fallacies Explained and Corrected," and, if there is a more soothing and satisfactory work to have beside one's bed, I should like to hear of it.

Its length is a mere nine hundred and eighty-five pages, and there are roughly about three popular fallacies explained on every page.

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The Prime Minister has recently pointed out how vastly our knowledge of history, geography, literature and art is being increased every day by means of a certain form of competition fostered in the daily and weekly Press. And yet even so, it seems, we live in a gullible world.

“Do comets affect the weather?” Mr. Ackermann feels it necessary to inquire and answer “No.” “Do snakes sting with their tongues?” “They do not.” But he probes our complacent ignorance far more deeply than this.

Personally, as I look through the pages of “Popular Fallacies Explained and Corrected,” I am astonished, like Clive, at my own moderation. It is the errors I have avoided that impress me rather than those that I have made. Select, for instance, the one case of spiders. Ready dupe as I am, the delusion that the Australian barking spiders do in fact make a noise like barking, is one into which I have never really fallen. “Well, perhaps not exactly like barking,” I should have said.

Truth

And the same is true of that cognate error, that the bites of the Malmignate, the Vancoho, the Katipo and the Queue-Rouge Spiders are very dangerous indeed. I was never pig-headed there.

Even if at a dinner-party at the club or elsewhere anyone had said to me in a challenging manner or with a satirical smile, "I suppose you are one of the poor nincompoops who believe that in the case of all spiders the female eats her spouse when she considers she has no further need of his services," I think I should have answered, "No, I don't know that I am. With regard to the voracity of female spiders I have always attempted to preserve an open mind."

To tell the truth, Mr. Ackermann's volume flatters my self-esteem. I begin to see myself as a sceptic when all my life long I believed myself a credulous ass. Of course I believed that the Duke of Clarence (brother of Edward IV of England) was put to death by being drowned in a butt of malmsey wine, and so did you. Like you also I believed that

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Cleopatra killed herself by applying an asp to her bosom, and that the Flood as described in Genesis actually occurred. But have I ever been taken in by that old wives' tale that the punishment of being blown from the muzzle of a gun was invented by Sir Mountstuart Elphinstone? I think not. Or when, in the course of conversation, I have been assured that Eve ate an apple in the Garden of Eden and gave one to Adam, which stuck in his throat, thus causing the first Adam's apple, have I always accepted the statement without reserve? Have I not admitted a possibility of dispute on this point, just as I have on the foolish beliefs that the ancient Egyptians used gold for stopping teeth, and that the s.s. *Sirius* and s.s. *Great Western* were (in 1838) the first steamers to cross the Atlantic entirely by steam power?

Undoubtedly Mr. Ackermann has over-estimated the size of my gullet.

I can go conscientiously through the whole of the hundred and twenty-five pages devoted to fallacies connected with the animal kingdom,

Truth

and declare on my conscience that there is many and many an absurd superstition from which I have always been entirely free. The man in the street, the kind of man you would see in an ordinary crowd, very likely goes about imagining that the tsetse fly is about three times the length of a blue-bottle fly, with its wings set up at right angles to the ground, and with its abdomen wholly exposed. One can see him, I think, in the bar of a public-house laying down the law on this matter. He brings his fist down with a crash that makes the glasses tingle and gives the barmaid a regular turn.

“Believe me or believe me not,” he says, “the abdomen of the tsetse fly is wholly exposed.”

But with me it was not so. Nor did I really think that crocodiles shed tears, that eagles soar to a great height in order to enjoy a view of the sun in his unclouded brilliancy, or that the bright red discoloration of the sea at times near Tierra del Fuego is due to spawn. Men have pointed at me as a scoffer,

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but I have not cared. My justification, I felt, was bound to come in the end. And now here it is.

Yet all the same I have a lurking respect for innocence. I would not shatter illusions too rapidly or too many at a time. The ignorant mass of the population should take Mr. Ackermann's book in small doses, lest they find the universe broken in pieces about them and have no rock to which to cling. The effect on a sensitive and confiding mind of discovering on one and the same day that cocoa is not made from cocoa-nuts, and that a wire-net fire-screen is more effective in screening the heat of the fire than a sheet of the same metal the same thickness as the wire of the wire-net, might be disastrous, and lead to an entire loss of faith. Sooner than destroy any more day-dreams I will present the reader with seven provocative questions about which error has arisen in vulgar minds. If he cannot answer them, let him buy Mr. Ackermann's book, and sip reverently at the fountain of truth.

Truth

- (1) Is exercise unimportant for girls ?
- (2) Are gorillas savage ?
- (3) Does cutting off two or three inches of the proximal or stalk end of a cucumber and then rubbing the two portions together take away its bitterness ?
- (4) At the moment of death, especially by drowning, is every event of the person's past life recalled ?
- (5) Will salt water put out fire ?
- (6) Was the Quantitative Law of Refraction discovered by Descartes ?
- (7) Did Dick Whittington come to London with a domestic animal called a cat ?

COUSIN FREDERICK

PERSIA. He had come back from Persia.

I began to think about it. A pink—or was it purple?—rhomboid on the map, a source of political trouble in the present and in the past, the home of Cyrus and Darius and the parasang, the export mart for many-hued rugs and the overcoat collars of actors and M.P.'s. Also oil. But over and beyond these things the tinkling of fountains, veiled beauties, the music of bulbuls, gardens beneath the moon. Romance. Yet somehow nothing precise, nothing definite. I was very glad therefore that my cousin Frederick, who had just come back from Persia, was to visit us. He should make Persia live.

Whenever a relative of mine comes back from a far-away place like Cochin China, for

Cousin Frederick

instance, or Ceylon, I feel like this. But there is a difficulty. I don't care to confess that I have made no serious mental effort to keep in touch with Cochin China or Ceylon since I left the Lower Fifth. It argues a kind of remissness on my part. I don't like to make a perfectly obvious remark about these places, such as "I suppose it takes a long time to get used to the size of the hens in Cochin China?" or, "I expect you must be missing the spice in the breezes now you have come home?" So I try ordinary non-committal sorts of questions in the hope of drawing them out.

I felt this difficulty strongly about Persia. If we had happened to be living in the time of the Emperor Darius I believe that I could have got on quite well with a man who had just come back from Persia. There are one or two stories in Herodotus, for instance—rather smoking-room stories, now I come to think of it, but I don't suppose my cousin Frederick would have minded that. The laxness of the East, you know. With regard to

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social life in Persia since Artaxerxes my mind was a bit misty. There was Omar Khayyám, of course. And Scheherazade. But was that Persia or Bagdad? And Flecker's *Hassan*. But, hang it all, that was Bagdad too. One must not confuse Persia with Mesopotamia. I seemed to have lost my sense of the Persian atmosphere for the last thousand years or so.

I was just walking across to get "Orn-Pht" out of the bottom shelf of the bookcase when my cousin Frederick arrived. He did not look as if he had been romanticized very much by his three-and-a-half years in Persia. He was not fierce-looking or lean. He was brown, but then he had always been that.

"Well," I said, "and how are you? Did you come up by Tube?"

Rather a bad opening that, really, I think. As if there was a Tube to Persia. But we always ask people who come to this house whether they came up by Tube. I think it is so that we can go on to tell them that they could have come by bus if they had gone a different way and walked a little further.

Cousin Frederick

This starts the ball rolling. It appeared, however, that my cousin Frederick had driven himself up in a motor-car. We went out together to look at it, and he told me things about it, and the reasons why he had bought it in preference to a great number of other cars. I felt at once that we were rather getting away from the glamour of the East.

“ I suppose you don’t have a car out there ? ” I said, trying to draw him back, and wondering what he did have. I did not quite like to suggest camels.

“ Oh, yes, I do ; I have a Ford out there,” he replied.

“ Oh ! ” I said. I always say “ Oh ! ” just like that, when anyone tells me he has a Ford. It seems to me to be the only tactful thing to say.

“ Do you have to motor much in Basra ? ” I went on sympathetically.

“ Well, I wasn’t in Basra, you know. I was in Bushire.”

“ Of course, how frightfully stupid of me. I always mix those two words up,” I mur-

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mured, as if I spent almost the whole day talking about Basra and Bushire and attempting to keep them distinct. "Pretty hot out there, I should imagine?"

"It's hot in the hot weather," he admitted, rather grudgingly, I thought, "and cold in the cold."

"I suppose you wear thinner things in the hot weather?"

"We wear thinner things in the summer and thicker things in the winter," he agreed.

I attempted, without success, to visualize the mysterious East.

"Did you get much sport?" I asked rather brilliantly as we went indoors again.

"Not bad," he said. "Snipe and duck."

"Oh, snipe and duck!" I exclaimed, trying to seem excited. As a matter of fact I had been expecting flamingoes or yak.

"What about a whisky-and-soda?" I suggested, concealing my chagrin.

"Very nice," replied my cousin Frederick.

Cousin Frederick

“ Do people drink much in Bas—Bushire ? ” I asked, holding up the glass and looking closely at it when he had said when.

“ A fair amount,” he said. “ Soda up to the top, please, for me.”

“ Not the natives, I suppose ? ” I hazarded. I had a kind of hazy recollection that the natives of Persia were Mohammedans, and lived upon sherbet and rice.

“ Not officially,” replied Frederick. “ But they mop up a good deal on the quiet whenever they get a chance.”

It did not seem to me that this pointed to a remarkable difference between the psychology of the Persian and the Anglo-Saxon peoples. But I said nothing.

“ And when do you go back ? ” I asked him, after a pause. It was rather early to ask that, of course, but Frederick had the air of one who has discussed Persia and its problems pretty thoroughly.

“ In October. But I shan’t be at Bushire then. I’m going up to Shiraz.”

“ Shiraz,” I thrilled. The word opened new

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vistas. One could not help feeling romantic about Shiraz.

"Surely," I said, "there are roses there."

"Fruit, too," he replied. "You can make jolly good cherry brandy, I believe, at Shiraz."

"And is it far from Bushire?"

"About a hundred miles as the crow flies," he said. "But you have to go over a couple of mountain ranges to get there."

"What on?"

"Mules."

"And is there good shooting there, too?"

"Very."

"What kind?" I asked hopefully.

"Snipe and duck," he said, "but more of it."

I gave up Shiraz and went back over the mountains to Bushire. I had had a sudden, brilliant idea.

"Have you brought back any photographs?" I asked.

"One or two," he said, taking out a pocket-case and handing me three. I looked at the

Cousin Frederick

first. It was a photograph of a black dog sitting on a chair.

“A setter,” I said.

“Part spaniel and part setter.”

I looked at the second photograph. It was a photograph of two black dogs sitting on two chairs. The third was another photograph of the first dog, sitting on the same chair.

“Do you play any games in Persia?” I inquired.

“Tennis,” he answered, “almost every evening.”

“On grass?”

“Mud.”

I made another rapid mental survey of the glories of Iran.

“And what do they give you to eat?” I asked.

“Oh, mutton, and chicken, and things out of tins.”

I felt that my cousin Frederick was not treating me quite fairly.

“Tell me about the natives,” I said. “What kind of people are they?”

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"Some of them are very good fellows indeed," he explained, "and some of them are rather swine."

"What sort of a chap is the Shah?" I went on. I was a little doubtful whether there was a Shah in Persia still. I thought there might be a Soviet. But it seemed to be all right.

"Oh, so-so," said my cousin Frederick.

I checked myself on the point of asking how many wives the Shah had. I felt quite certain what Frederick would have replied. He would have said, "A fairish lot." I thought of something else.

"Do you see much of the Shah?" I said.

"Well, you see, he's always in Paris," said Frederick.

I dismissed the Shah. I had thought of another thing.

"I want you, Frederick," I said, "to come and look at our Persian rug."

"Yes?" he said, looking at it. He did not seem very enthusiastic.

Cousin Frederick

“It comes from Bokhara,” I continued.
“We think it is very old.”

“Did it cost you much?” he inquired.

“Yes,” I said. “Isn’t it very old?”

“No, it isn’t,” replied Frederick. “Old Persian rugs don’t fade. That’s the beauty of them. Only modern ones fade. The Persians rub them with lime to make the colours dim, because the English and Americans like them to look old. That’s all.”

“Thank you, Frederick,” I said, bowing my head low before the blast. “What about another whisky-and-soda?”

“Very nice indeed,” said my cousin Frederick. I decided not to ask him about the bulbuls at all.

THE HOUSE-HUNTER

IT would be seen sometimes hovering shyly on the fringes of a Sussex forest, only to fade and reappear again at the corner of a hopfield in Kent. It would be chased across the flatlands and the marshes, it would be glimpsed near Winchelsea or Hastings, pass onward to the downs and plunge into the Channel with a disappointing splash. Or again it would turn northward, cross the Thames, and be pursued with a harroo and a weylaway into Hertfordshire, there for a moment sit like an eagle alit in the light of its shining wings, then double again and be lost until perhaps a rustling was heard in the undergrowth of a spinney on the boundary of Bucks and Berks. But that vision also would die.

The House-Hunter

"In wet wood and weary lane
Still we pant and pound in vain,
Still with leaden foot we chase
Waning pinion, fainting face."

Need I say that I am referring to Robinson's country cottage?

It came to him in so many guises. Now it would have a Tudor air, and now it would be dressed in the garb of Queen Anne. Sometimes it would be merely modern, but Georgian or Elizabethan in style. Sometimes he built it for himself. Now and then, in moments of despair, it became nothing but a wooden bungalow, or, even worse, a whitewashed railway carriage, lying on the coast in one of those haphazard heaps of whitewashed railway carriages that look like an accident to an express train glozed over by the company and provided with water-butts. And then he would arouse himself from this evil dream and start advertising again.

I am referring, I say, to Robinson's country cottage.

Snared for a moment in exactly the position

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he desired, standing alone, with a fringe of trees and commanding an extensive and beautiful view, it would lack company's water and electric light. Cornered in an old-world village, it would be two miles stat., have inadequate offices, or only one sit. With every modern convenience, it would be an eyesore, surrounded by ophthalmic troubles even more serious than itself. The presence of a bathroom would condemn it to dun-coloured brick. Modern sanitation appeared to necessitate rubble and pseudo-beams. He would quarter the ground, give a view-hallo and be over the hills again. He brought it to bay at last in the columns of "The East Ham Advertiser and Frittingly Gazette."

It didn't fulfil his dreams, of course, but it was fairly inoffensive. It stood on the side of a hill and had a view, if you looked carefully, of the downs. It has the advantage also of standing in its own grounds, which were fairly numerous if you reckoned them by the perch. It was made of red brick, and

The House-Hunter

the windows did not seem to have been constructed by a malignant enemy of mankind. He wavered when he went to see it—wavered and was lost.

“It won’t slip off, I suppose?” he said to the owner as they stood balancing themselves on the slope of the front lawn. “I’ve been chasing it now for so long.”

The fellow did not understand. He merely coughed. Then he pointed out to Robinson with considerable pride the position of the sumph. After that he took him indoors.

“This is the dining-room, but we use it as a drawing-room,” he said. And a few moments later, “This is really the kitchen, but we use it as a dining-room.”

He opened the doors of another cupboard.

“This is really the scullery, but we use it as a kitchen, you see; and that is the larder beyond.”

“And what do you use the larder for?” asked Robinson in some awe. “A billiard-room?”

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The owner took him into the ex-kitchen again and pointed out the view.

“Beyond that dip in the downs,” he said, “you can just see the sea.”

They then went upstairs. In the largest of the three bedrooms the owner pointed at the view again.

“You can see more of the sea from here,” he said.

“But it’s the same sea, isn’t it?” asked Robinson cunningly.

He had him there. It was.

Several houses of a similar kind were strewn on the hill-side and appeared to lean over and look into the room. The owner observed the direction of Robinson’s gaze.

“Very nice neighbours,” he remarked anxiously.

“I’m sure they are,” said Robinson cheerfully. “We shall be able to have very nice talks in the morning while we shave.”

“I planted a tree down there,” said the owner, pointing to a small leafless twig on the

The House-Hunter

lawn, "which will absolutely prevent you from being overlooked on the south-south-east in a year or two."

"We can still sing to each other," said Robinson, "through the boughs. By the way, how far is it to the sea?"

"A mile by the path," said the owner, "but actually not more than three-quarters as the crow flies."

"I shall be using the path principally," said Robinson. "I suppose I shall be able to bathe when I get there, I mean without a tent or a hut?"

"Oh yes," said the owner; "everybody does. Twenty or thirty at a time. Women and all."

"Oh yes," said Robinson faintly. He was rather a shy man.

"There's not room for a garage," he suggested at last, with a faint stirring of hope, "if I ever wanted to make one."

"The easiest thing in the world," said the owner. "All you've got to do is to cut a

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hole into the side of the hill near the gate."

"Of course," said Robinson nervously, fingering his pocket-knife. "I forgot the side of the hill."

"What's more," went on the owner, "you could easily add on two more rooms, if you liked, on the west side."

"Without interfering," inquired Robinson innocently, "with the library sink? By the way, is there anything I ought to know about the tenure of the land? Anything I mayn't do?"

"Nothing important," said the owner. "You mayn't open a shop, and you mayn't take in more than a reasonable number of good-class paying guests."

"That is rather hard," said Robinson. "I had rather thought of making it a kind of rural substitute for Pelfridges and the Parkleigh Hotel. With nice neighbours, of course," he went on gracefully, "and graduated views of the sea."

All the same, he bought it, signed the agree-

The House-Hunter

ment, paid a deposit, accepted a drink. As I said, there was nothing really offensive about the place. He wanted a cottage. This one had no vice.

And then, going back to the station, remorse assailed him. Gone the happy days of hunting, when every strip of wood held glimpses of the ideal, every opening hollow of the downs might reveal the shape of the beloved. Gone the joy of the chase, the hope, the frenzy of the gallop through "The Times."

The car stopped at the station.

Mechanically Robinson looked at the building on the opposite side of the road. It said, in very large letters :

THE OFFICES OF THE EAST HAM ADVERTISER AND FRITTINGLY GAZETTE

"After all, why not?" he thought, and went inside.

"I want to advertise a cottage for sale," he said. "Steepside, it's called."

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“ We have an advertisement about Steepside already, I think,” they told him.

“ I know,” said Robinson ; “ I want you to keep it on in my name.”

“ THE DAILY GNAT ”

I SHALL never forget the morning when the “ Daily Gnat ” founded its new religion.

July was nearly over. The summer had been very hot, so that a kind of sleepy silence seemed to brood even over the excitements of the season. I don't know how it is that great heat is able to have this muffling effect even on a city like London, so that the noises of commerce and amusement seem to be no longer a continuous uproar, but mutterings in a giant's sleep.

At nine o'clock, as I looked into my back garden after a very light breakfast, the hum of traffic in the streets had a strange unreality. There was not a breath of wind. A few anthrhinums glowed blood-red or bright yellow in their baked patch of earth; a faint scent

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stole up from the jasmine on the wall. I noticed that one of the hollyhocks was out. Somewhere far away steam escaped with a soft insistent murmur from a stationary lorry. Bricklayers were building a garage next door, but it was a drowsy, rhythmical proceeding. Nothing could have been further from my expectation than the development of any new campaign in the "Daily Gnat" offices before the beginning of August, when I hoped to get away. The street was terrible with its pitiless glare, but the Underground Railway was tempered by a cool, if artificial, breeze. Everybody had his coat off in Boot Lane. It was almost too hot to light a cigarette.

Saunders, when I came into his room, was tugging his yellowish moustaches by turns in the nervous, anxious way he had whenever the Business Editor bounced in.

"I don't like it," Saunders was saying. "I don't like it at all."

"It's the very thing," said Stephenson.

He was a little, brisk, birdlike man. I

“ The Daily Gnat ”

think he was impressed with the notion that he had a personality. I dare say he was right. I never know what a personality is. He often brought new ideas to the editorial room, and Saunders always accepted them, after a certain show of reluctance. But it seemed scarcely necessary for Stephenson to have a new idea just now : except, of course, one of the usual devices for making the children of England remember the “ Daily Gnat ” whilst they were playing on the sands.

That, I think, was what worried Saunders most.

“ Why just now ? ” he went on, tugging his moustaches again. “ Why can’t we wait a little ? ”

“ My dear fellow,” said Stephenson a trifle impatiently. “ You must have it now, so that people can talk it over in the holidays. That’ll give it a hold. Closeness to Nature, too. Fresh air. New energy. Everybody in the mood for starting life over again.”

“ Um-m ! ” said Saunders.

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I knew he was going to Tenby himself. He had five children, and was a very much domesticated man.

“Tell us how, exactly, you see the thing,” he said at last, with a sigh.

Stephenson told us.

“Everybody knows that the Churches are doing no good—congregations falling off—subscriptions not coming in. Why? Too many difficulties, too many shades of creed. Too much wrangling about subtleties that the people of this country don’t care a hang for in these days. What they want’s a good, simple, straightforward religion, telling them to be virtuous, without a lot of unintelligible dogma in it; healthy and straight from the shoulder. Mind you, this is a big thing. I’m perfectly serious. I can put the whole thing in a nutshell for you if you like.”

He stuck his hands in his pockets, walked across the room to the window, looked down at a motor-bus, and wheeled round sharply, facing us again.

“People want to be religious,” he said

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decisively, “ but they don’t want to go to church.”

“ I don’t know so much about that,” said Saunders, jabbing at his desk with a pencil. “ These Anglo-Catholic fellows——”

“ Anglo-Catholic nothing,” said Stephenson shortly.—He made use of these occidentalisms at times. I think it was part of his notion of personality.—“ They don’t cut any ice at all. There’ll never be more than a small percentage of people in this country who care for that ritualistic tomfoolery. Played out,” he said, “ and the Protestant business is played out too. Not enough warmth and colour in it. Love, Brotherhood, Kindliness,—that’s the idea ! ”

“ What is going to happen to the actual Churches ? ” I inquired, “ when you—if this catches on ? ”

I hadn’t said anything before, and I wanted to show Stephenson that I was taking a proper interest in his scheme.

“ The Churches can take their chance,” he said impatiently. “ They can fall into line if

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they like. If not, they can lump it. There'll be nothing in our religion that clashes with theirs. What we have to do is to get the thing well under way. I can give you all the space you want. I've just been talking to Wetherby, and he's drawn up a provisional creed."

Saunders, who had dropped his head in his hands, started, and moved a little in his chair. I took out my handkerchief and blew my nose. Wetherby had acted as a special correspondent in various parts of the world, but nothing about him suggested his particular suitability for drawing up creeds.

Stephenson planked down a piece of typescript on the table in front of the editor. I walked up to him and looked over his shoulder. This is what I read :

1. I BELIEVE IN BROTHERLY LOVE.
2. I BELIEVE IN HELPING OTHERS.
3. I ADVOCATE PEACE.
4. I BELIEVE IN THE AVOIDANCE OF SOCIAL UNREST.
5. I BELIEVE IN SIMPLICITY, THRIFT AND HARD WORK.

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**6. I BELIEVE THAT NO QUARTER
SHOULD BE GIVEN TO IMMORAL-
ITY IN LITERATURE AND ART.**

**7. I BELIEVE IN HEALTH, HAPPINESS,
AND HYGIENE.**

“ Too indefinite,” murmured Saunders, after studying the document for a few moments. And he gave a little sigh, I thought, of thankfulness. “ Nothing whatever to lay hold of in that.”

It was here that Stephenson gave vent to what I still consider to be an epoch-making remark.

“ Buttons,” he said curtly, and walked across to the window again.

I remember that there was a block in Fleet Street at the moment. A decorated car advertising the new play “ Get A Move On ” was halted just underneath our window.

“ How do you mean, ‘ buttons ’ ? ” asked Saunders rather querulously.

“ You don’t need a definite programme when you’ve got a definite thing,” said Stephenson. “ Everybody who joins the ‘ Daily Gnat ’

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religion will buy a button from us and wear it. I thought of a blue button with a white flower. How does that appeal to you ? ”

He turned, for some reason or other, to me.

It appealed to me more strongly than I was able to say.

“ We must have a motto on it, of course,” he continued. “ What do you say to ‘ LOVE, ORDER, PEACE ’ ? ”

“ Why not ‘ orders ’ ? ” inquired Saunders innocently. “ British Trade’s in rather a bad way, isn’t it ? ”

It was his last fling, and Stephenson took no notice of him, except to make a rather contemptuous gesture.

“ Suppose we said ‘ LOVE, HOPE, PEACE,’ ” I suggested. And “ LOVE, HOPE, PEACE ” it eventually was. The buttons, which cost sixpence each, were made of enamel.

* * *

Wetherby was the serpent in the garden. I suppose one might have expected it. He had none of the diffidence of Saunders, and none of the earnestness that went rather oddly with

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Stephenson's business *flair*. He had drawn up the creed in a mood of cynical frivolity, but as soon as he heard what our motto was going to be he told Stephenson that he agreed with Saunders. The thing was not definite enough.

“ What are we *giving* people ? ” he went about saying. “ We've got the word ‘ Hope ’ in. Hope for what ? ”

He suggested the inclusion in the creed of a belief in naked sun-baths, or alternatively in a return to the land. Stephenson argued, not unnaturally, that it would be ridiculous to put that sort of thing into a creed. Besides, it was now September, and matters were going already fairly well. The seaside campaign had been a success. Flags as well as buttons had been provided, sand-castles on which to display them had been erected at all the more popular watering-places, and we were receiving letters of encouragement from all sides. Button-wearers, at first sparsely, but every day more numerous, were to be seen in the streets. The original posters bearing the simple announcement :

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**"THE 'DAILY GNAT' STARTS A NEW
RELIGION"**

were followed later by :

**"'DAILY GNAT'S' RELIGION DOING
WELL"**

"ARE YOU ONE OF US?"

"COUNT THE BUTTONS"

"L. H. P."

And many more.

The creed had had a very marked effect both upon sales and upon advertising revenue. We were able to ignore the malice of the rival daily which suggested that the three great initials stood for Lower Horse Power, or Less Hydraulic Pressure.

Wetherby, however, was always wanting more. He had a silly and frivolous tendency to exaggerate. Stephenson would have been contented with a gradual increase of adherents by means of Button Picnics, Soirées and Button Whist Drives in the suburbs, together with photographs of pretty button-wearers (button-

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ettes, we called them) in the illustrated part of the paper. It was Wetherby who pleaded for the mass meeting of button-wearers in the Albert Hall, which caused several bishops and other prominent persons to speak very slightly of the new creed. Wetherby insisted that this was all to the good, for every new religion has thrived on the disapproval of those in authority, and he persuaded Saunders to let him write a series of imaginary letters from people in country villages who had been socially boycotted through the influence of the vicar or the squire for displaying the “ Daily Gnat ” button, and from small tradespeople who had had the custom of the gentry withdrawn. He also got up the “ Whom Have You Helped To-day ? ” series which was parodied by one or two flippant writers in the weekly Press. My own share in the work was confined to writing occasional leaders advocating the new belief, and I tried to write them with as much dignity and calm as possible : though here again Wetherby made a nuisance of himself by saying that hysteria was a

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feature of all new religion, and that my style was much too austere.

By this time the pages of the "Daily Gnat" presented a very remarkable appearance, for the words "LOVE, HOPE, PEACE" were inset all over its columns, even amongst the racing forecasts, so that, as Saunders often pointed out, they might easily have been mistaken by the ignorant for the names of probable winners in forthcoming events. Selected sentences from the creed would be found, as likely as not, in the middle of the city news or half-way down enthusiastic critiques of new and daring plays.

Then Wetherby started the Street Corner Crusade.

"Every new religion," he said, "must have recourse to personal missionary effort."

Stephenson encouraged the idea, but he was very firm about the details. He insisted upon ordinary modern dress, and that is how the final crash, which I had long been fearing, occurred.

About the beginning of October Stephenson went away for a week's holiday, and Wetherby,

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who as the author of the notion had been selected as one of our principal preachers, allowed his imagination to run riot. He came down to the office on a bright, clear morning that had a touch of autumn in it, wearing a costume that suggested at the same time a Benedictine monk and a hetman of Cossacks. I remember that he wore a sheepskin hat, and a little purple cape behind. Instead of selecting one of the quiet streets, which we had formerly used for our services, he began to address people outside the Underground Station at Blackfriars Bridge during a jam in the traffic. The police moved him on, of course, and there was a good deal of jeering. A shabbily dressed man threw a banana, and was slapped in the face by a buttonette. Cartoons appeared in the evening Press.

Stephenson was very angry about it when he returned ; there was a bitter quarrel and Wetherby walked straight out of our office into that of the “Daily Wire.” He secured a good contract at once. Then the blow fell.

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Only a week later the "Daily Wire" filled the City with posters and new sheets announcing

**"THE 'DAILY WIRE' GIVES YOU A SIMPLE
RELIGION**

AND

A FUTURE LIFE"

At the same time it offered a free present of a pair of cuff-links or a brooch, made of rolled gold and engraved with the motto "FOREVER," to all subscribers who were willing to join.

Saunders, tugging each moustache in turn, leant back in his chair.

"That's got us, I think," he said. "Just like Wetherby. What d'you think he's done? Roped the Spiritualists in?"

"I expect so," I said.

Stephenson professed indifference.

"It won't catch on. People don't want it," he said.

But it did catch on: long enough, at any rate, to damage our circulation considerably.

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In a few days Stephenson ordered the “ Daily Gnat’s ” religion to close down, not suddenly, of course, but by degrees. He substituted an appeal to the mothers of England to have their children inoculated, by a newly discovered process, against adenoids. It was a good scheme, but aroused nothing like so much sympathy amongst our readers as “ LOVE, HOPE, PEACE.”

At any rate, there was never any strong call for the new buttons.

A VERY GREAT MAN

A RATHER sad thing has just happened to Habberley, the poet, a man who has always been sensitive to the precise value of fame. He is not, for instance, like James II. As Dryden tells us in his great ode, when James II heard of his brother's last illness :

“Half unarrayed he ran to his relief
So hasty and so artless was his grief ;
Approaching Greatness met him with her charms
Of power and future state,
But looked so ghastly in a brother's fate,
He shook her from his arms.”

I always like to think of James II in his shirt-sleeves, detaching himself from that importunate female, as she came through the corridors of Whitehall.

But Habberley, the poet, never in any circumstances shakes advancing greatness from

A Very Great Man

his arms. And it is for this reason largely, I think, that he has devised a system of beginning, instead of ending, his lines with punctuation marks. Thus :

“ the spring has asked our pardon
for what she did of wrong
, the tulips in the garden
are flaming all day long
: all things must live (
god wot) i too forgive. . . .”

which is the second poem, if you remember, in the collection entitled “ I Should Worry ” (1921) and the eighth and last in “ I’ll Tell the World ” (1922). In “ Combings ” (1923) it immediately precedes that exquisite piece beginning :

“ destiny
and the rolling of years
? that tea-cup poised in the air
and laughter
and tears
: the light has touched your hair your hand
ah god if these
! but you would not understand
you have forgot
, no sugar please
yes
! just a spot. . . .”

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in which the same tendency is revealed. Nor need we cavil, I think, at the practice of spelling the name of the Deity with a small "g," when the same reticence is shown by the poet in the use of the word "i."

Criticism of his work has a more immediate and remarkable effect upon Habberley than upon any other writer I ever met, and that is saying a good deal. A word of praise transports him to the seventh heaven ; the slightest touch of disapproval plunges him into the depths of gloom. I shall never forget his outburst of rage when "The Spectator," I think it was, found fault with his rather original use of the semicolon, or his delight when "The New Statesman" declared that he had sounded a new note in song, a tribute all the more remarkable because Habberley's political views are of a somewhat reactionary kind.

But it is the delicate flattery of the photograph that pleases Habberley most. How often you must have seen in the illustrated weekly Press, and in most of the morning papers :

A Very Great Man

“The author of ‘Combings’ writing at his favourite desk.”

As a matter of fact Habberley nearly always writes lying on the floor.

Or, “Mr. Habberley, the poet, seeks inspiration in his garden.”

Whereas in very truth Mr. Habberley’s inspiration invariably comes to him while he is smoking a pipe in a hot bath.

There are, of course, Photographs and photographs. Photographic fame comes fairly easily to murderers, to those who have just written a book or those who have invented a new machine, and genius competes in the papers with mere notoriety, with recent additions to the Zoological Gardens and even at times with the larger vegetable growths. To be photographed on account of some particular achievement, in fact, is in these days a trifling affair.

There is then a secondary stage. This is to have one’s photograph published constantly, either with a correct or an incorrect name underneath it, as the photograph of a well-

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known man. This, too, has often happened to Habberley. I do not think that even on the day when he appeared as the Secretary of the Amalgamated Steel Nut and Crank Makers Association he was seriously annoyed. It was obvious that he existed somewhere in a portrait-gallery of famous men, and only one of those clerical errors, to which all journalists are liable, had caused the confusion.

But there is yet a third stage in photographic fame, the highest and the hardest to reach. This is when one's mere presence on the steps of a building or casual appearance in the streets provokes the prowling camera-fiend. Such tribute is reserved in the main for Royalty, for Cabinet Ministers, for cinematograph stars, and for those whose faces are so familiar that they have already become a household want. For all his talent one could not yet quite put Habberley in this list.

It was therefore with a genuine thrill of joy that he heard a friend accost him last week with the words :

“Hullo, Habberley ! I saw a snapshot of

A Very Great Man

you walking through Trafalgar Square, this morning.”

“ Oh ? ” said Habberley, pretending to a faint derisory amusement which he was very far from feeling. “ What paper was that in ? ”

He was told. Needless to say, he made a very swift excursion to the nearest bookstall. What was his chagrin to find on the back page of the—but why be too precise in so painful a matter?—a photograph with the following words inscribed beneath it :

“ Mr. Jan Van Albert, the Dutch giant, snapshotted in Trafalgar Square yesterday close to an ordinary man.”

Habberley was the second of these two.

THE SCAREMONGER

WHEN I play billiards I like to give my whole attention to the game. I prefer an atmosphere of cloistered calm, broken only by the faint click of the ivory balls.

Blisterworth seems to consider a game of billiards an opportunity of unburdening himself of all those thoughts to which no one would listen if he expressed them at any other time. He sees his opponent as a caged prisoner and the green table as an altar of sacrifice. What is worse, he plays rather well.

“ ‘The Times’ is quite right,” he said solemnly as he went into baulk, “to devote all this space to the warfare in China. I only wish they would give us more articles on the subject.”

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"Oh, yes," I answered, attempting an all-round cannon. "Why?"

"The Yellow Peril," said Blisterworth, "has been gravely under-estimated. It seems fairly clear to me that in thirty or forty years' time our so-called civilization will be overrun by Mongol and Tartar hordes. The actual troops, I have no doubt, will be chiefly Chinese. But I see no reason why Europe should submit to destiny without a struggle, and, instead of bickering over boundaries, reparations and tariffs, instead of grouting the piers of an obsolete cathedral, it seems to me that all which remains of what was once called Christendom should be banding itself together by solemn vows to resist the mighty menace from the East. Do you notice that Wei Hung Li has flung himself into Chow?"

"Has he, indeed?" I said, missing the middle pocket. "That's very serious."

Blisterworth was by this time eighteen and I was five.

"And whom do you think our old friend, Hang Yu, has formed a combination with

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now ? ” he went on, finishing a rather nice little break at the top of the table.

“ Hang Yu ? ”

“ Yes, Hang Yu.”

I was unable to think of anybody with whom Hang Yu would have been likely to form a combination at the present time. I resented the sinister presence of this Oriental in the room. I was about to play a very fine and difficult losing hazard, almost the first leave which Blisterworth, a singularly grudging and ungenerous player, had presented to me.

“ I haven’t the slightest idea,” I confessed.

“ Wo Hei Wo ! ” shouted Blisterworth in a loud exultant tone.

I ran a coup.

“ One of the main things,” observed Blisterworth, calmly chalking the tip of his cue with a piece of chalk that he had stolen from the Club and was keeping in his right-hand trouser pocket, “ that prevents us from paying due attention to the gathering storm-clouds is what we foolishly suppose to be the comical nature of Chinese names. We cannot imagine a man

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named Wang Mang doing anything more subversive than eating rats and dogs, drinking bird's-nest soup, smoking opium or sailing about in a junk ; or possibly, in extreme cases, failing to send back our collars from the wash. But is there anything really more funny in reading about the astute and crafty Tai Ping or the reckless and vainglorious Wing Wong than in reading about the astute Lloyd George or the reckless and vainglorious Ramsay Macdonald ? Why should we laugh ? ”

Why indeed ? I wondered, glancing at the scoring-board and grinding my teeth. “ A couple of breaks of about fifteen each,” I said to myself, “ and I should be on terms with the confounded fellow.” I bent to the task.

“ Can you doubt,” he continued relentlessly, “ that the Romans smiled at the name of Alaric when they first heard the mutterings of the storm, just as you are smiling at the Yellow Peril to-day ? ”

“ I wasn't smiling at the Yellow Peril, if

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you want to know," I said rather crossly. "I was trying to pot the red."

But Blisterworth remained imperturbable.

"I suppose," he said, "that we shall still be giggling at the funniness of Mongolian names when a Japanese fleet is lying in the Mediterranean; we shall still titter when we are told that a Chu Yang has overrun the Netherlands, a Feng Pei has ransacked the streets of Berlin, and London itself is cowering at the mercy of a Mu. That was eleven, wasn't it? Three off the red. There's just a chance that I may pot you this time if I'm not very careful."

He potted me.

"Tut, tut," he said. "Tut, tut. Now, as I was saying, not only do we need a Singapore base, but several Singapore bases or their equivalents. And we need a great deal more than that. We need a firm federation of the Latin and Anglo-Saxon-speaking peoples, pledged to stand shoulder to shoulder and put away petty differences in the face of the

The Scaremonger

common foe. I'm afraid I've left you rather tucked up under the cushion there."

"I'm afraid you have," I said, miscueing.

The balls were now left very nicely together for Blisterworth.

"You must not imagine," he said with great *empressement* as he took advantage of the opening, "that there is any impossibility in the idea of a military alliance between the Soviet Government of Russia and the theocratic Empire of Japan. The Oriental is no visionary where material interests are concerned, and with the prospect of looting Europe in front of them, Mongol and Tartar might well make common cause. Ninety-one—forty-seven. No, that's not your ball, I'm afraid; it's mine. You're in the middle there. You'll need the long rest. I don't consider it unlikely that we shall live to see an Asiatic army once again thundering at the gates of Europe and the streets of her fairest cities bathed in blood."

I still maintain that it was more by accident than by design that in bringing the point of the long cue down I struck Blisterworth's

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forehead and nose with the point of it in such a way that the latter began to bleed violently. Nobody could be more sorry than I was that he had to go away and lie down with a key at the back of his neck in the small drawing-room, so that he was unable to finish the game. Billiards is a game full of remarkable fluctuations, and it is quite on the cards, as I have pointed out to several members of the club, that even if he had not retired I might have won.

Nevertheless I am bound to admit that the position from my point of view was becoming exceedingly desperate. The Mongol, so to speak, was at the gates.

LUCINDA

“DON’T you ever not smoke,” I asked her, “when you drive?”

“Oh, yes, quite often,” she said. “I’m not really a chain smoker at all.”

“A sort of clutch smoker!” I suggested. “I sometimes wonder if it’s quite safe for you to take them out and light them like that.”

We were simply wriggling along the tarmac.

“It took me a year to learn,” she admitted. “There ought to be some kind of machine really for feeding cigarettes to the driver out of the centre of the wheel.”

“And you could have a kind of hanging torch——” I began.

“Oh, blast!” she interrupted; “there’s another policeman.”

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“Funny,” she went on, when the menace had cleared away, “how, instead of regarding policemen as perfectly delightful people, as I did when I was at school, I am always being afraid of them now.”

“Like the poor,” I said.

“They can practically do anything, you know, to a motorist. And what’s more, they do. It isn’t only a matter of looking at one’s licence. One of them stopped me the other day to measure the size of my number-plate. And once they actually came and examined my brakes.”

I thought it was a pardonable curiosity, but I did not like to say so.

“Supposing,” she said, “one had a right to stop policemen and examine them. I don’t see why not. One could get out and measure their belts, and see if their number was properly displayed. Or look at their licences. They have licences, haven’t they?”

“I expect so,” I agreed, “concealed about their persons somewhere or other. It’s possible, of course, that wild humorists do dress

Lucinda

themselves up as policemen and go and stand in lonely country roads for the purpose of annoying motorists. I never thought of that. It's a weary life, a motorist's, I suppose. One is everybody's slave."

"There are compensations, though," she said, cleverly avoiding a cow. "Somebody hooted behind me on a hill the other day. Apparently they wanted me to slow down and let them pass. I wasn't going to let them pass on a hill, of course, but I did when I got to the top. Then I saw the car had no number-plate. So of course it was the King."

"I see," I said.

"And I passed the Queen a week or two ago," she continued, "on a lonely country road, and she bowed. It was rather awkward, because what was I to do, tucked in behind the wheel like this ? "

"You could stop smoking, of course," I said.

"I know ; but that was practically all. One ought really to have a little flag that one could run up and wave quickly on occasions like these."

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“You’re rather adding to the number of handles,” I complained. “A beginner, you know, would be always waving flags or feeding himself with cigarettes when he wanted to avoid hitting the back of a bus. Do you, by the way,” I asked rather nervously, for we seemed now to be going very fast indeed, “hit the back of many things.”

“I shaved a steam-lorry yesterday. You can see that by the front mud-guard.” (I could.) “It had been pouring the most putrid clouds of smelly smoke all over me for nearly a mile and wouldn’t listen to my horn. And then it came out when I tried to pass it. I was half in the ditch too. It was plastered all over with advertisements. And what do you think they were. ‘EAT CRUSTO BREAD, THE FOOD OF LIFE.’ I asked the driver whether he was cooking it inside. But he didn’t seem to have any sense of humour.”

“They seldom do on steam-lorries,” I agreed. “It’s something in the life. But

Lucinda

don't hit another if you can help it. I always think the second time's so unlucky."

We shaved a dog.

"Airedale," she said. "I had him marked. Aberdeens and Cairns are the worst. I had to stop altogether for a Cairn the other day. I slowed, and then slowed some more, and then tried to dodge him. But he would walk in front. And when I'd stopped, what do you suppose he did?"

"Licked the radiator?" I suggested.

"Came round and asked to be taken up into the car," she said. "Apparently he liked motoring. Hobby of his. And that was his notion of getting a drive."

Dusk and our lights came on. There was a loud bang against the side of the car.

"What on earth was that?"

"Don't know," she said. "White owl, possibly. I did kill one like that."

"Then you do really kill—er—things sometimes?"

"Only that," she said, "and a hare once. And nearly a butcher-boy. He came through

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the wind-screen, but he wasn't very badly hurt. It was his fault entirely."

The outer suburbs began.

"Great Scott," I said, "you nearly did it that time!"

They were two cyclists.

"Bravest people in the world," commented Lucinda. "If I were a cyclist I wouldn't ride without a rear-light for a thousand pounds. And they always wobble."

I supposed cyclists ought to be compelled to wear rear-lights by law.

"Either that," she said, "or cowbells hung round their necks."

"You seem to me to have a wonderful lot of original notions," I observed. "You ought to have a stand at Olympia on your own next year to exhibit them. I suppose you know everything about the inside of a car—the engine, I mean, and all that sort of thing?"

"Nothing in the world," replied Lucinda cheerfully. "I never bother with the inside of my engine except for water and oil."

"But surely——"

Lucinda

“ Well, why should I? People are so awfully good at making engines and things nowadays. One doesn’t have to keep looking inside one’s watch to know how the works are going.”

“ No,” I said, “ I suppose not.”

We escaped, apparently by the mercy of Providence, between two converging trams.

“ Have you got any cigarettes ? ” inquired Lucinda. “ I’ve run out.”

THE MAJOR

THE orchards had been cut down and part of the woods, but so lately that the fruit trees had not been prevented from flowering, and their blossoms were mingled on the ground with the violets and anemones. The weather was very fine, and the air so clear that distance became a fascinating illusion. Far away and to the right there seemed to be a long low church standing on a hill, but it was really the triforium of a cathedral. The rest of the building was hidden by the ridge. In the little copses that had escaped the enemy's axe the nightingales sang all night, and where there were cattle-pools the frogs made a great noise. This seemed stranger because away in the distance there was always a great glare at night and

The Major

a firework display, as if for a festival. And in the rear, when one was not close to the copses or the pools, there would be heard very faintly now and then on the night breeze the sound, apparently, of some quite peculiar bird—a mechanical tinkling note. But it really came from the ruined village behind. It was the slight tapping of metal strikers against the shell-cases which were hung up as gas gongs. But in daylight one did not hear these.

The Colonel, the Major, the Adjutant, and a Lieutenant who was responsible for signals and other things, lived in a cellar over which there had once been a farm-house, but now only the cellar remained. A pair of house-martins had returned with the spring, and not finding the farm-house, had decided to nest in the rafters beneath the cellar roof. This was a constant source of remark, because when a runner or an orderly staggered down the steep steps of the cellar, the house-martins flew out suddenly like little ghosts, almost between his legs.

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The Major and the Lieutenant were deputed to visit the front line, which was more than a thousand yards away, as far, in fact, as the next farm, and consisted of a few scattered outposts, and not trenches at all. The enemy were a mile or more beyond that. One could see their lines and support lines shining in the sun. Three months ago they had gone back to strong places, and of their own accord. The rear-guards had been beaten in. Over the low ground between the ridges there was no point in fighting further—yet.

Twice a day the enemy shelled the larger spinneys, and once a day, at 4 p.m., the remnants of the little hamlet that lay to the left of the cellar. That was called “afternoon tea.” At night they made fireworks.

Just now it was very still.

“Stillier than England,” said the Major.

“No railway trains,” said the Lieutenant.

The Major was in a very gay humour, for he had had a bath. The enemy left the bath behind, and the Major, at some cost and labour, had had it brought along. He had

The Major

bathed in cold water under the open sky, and been dried by the sun. Between the cellar and the support companies, who lay in a hollow, a hare got up, and tore away over the hill slope, and later two partridges rose with a whirr.

The support companies were weak because of things which had happened a little further north, and a few days before. But they seemed to be comfortable, and the front line had little to report.

"A man turned a cow out into one of the fields behind the enemy lines about an hour ago," said the company commander on the left.

The outposts were all well wired. The patrols had met nobody in the night. The Major and the Lieutenant returned.

"Lot of crows' nests in that wood," said the Major. "Think I'm going to get some eggs."

"What for?" asked the Lieutenant.

"Colonel's daughter. She collects 'em. You can come and help me."

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"Blowed if I'm going to climb trees," said the Lieutenant. He was eight years older than the Major, after all.

They went into the spinney.

"Look rather silly, shouldn't we," said the Lieutenant, as the Major started shinning up a tree, "if they shelled this bit of wood just now?"

"They won't," said the Major.

He got his crows' eggs, and even better than that, and with pardonable triumph, a magpie's egg. He brought this down in his mouth. He wrapped all the eggs very carefully in moss and grass, tied his handkerchief round them, and put them in his soft cap.

"Sure to get broken," said the Lieutenant.

"Not a bit," said the Major. They came out into the sunlight.

On the bare, ridged ground between the spinney and the cellar, near the sunk road, something tiny was moving.

"Hullo, what's that?" said the Lieutenant. It came in sight again.

"Mole," said the Major.

The Major

They watched it. Distracted, apparently without aim, it ran about hither and thither, an atom of fur.

“Tell you what,” said the Major. “Ground’s too hard for the little beggar. He can’t burrow back. Just lend me your cap a moment.”

He threw the Lieutenant’s cap at it, and after one or two attempts covered and picked it up.

“Bite like sin if I gave him a chance,” he said. “We’ll have to start a burrow for him.”

The Lieutenant dug a mine-shaft with his stick. The mole was put down, and disappeared with astonishing speed from sight.

“Rummy cove,” commented the Major.

“I suppose,” said the Lieutenant, remembering other parts of the line, “he might think the same of us.”

In the afternoon the Major blew the eggs very carefully, and packed them in a chocolate-box with cotton-wool.

“Won’t they be smashed in the post?” asked the Lieutenant.

Quaint Specimens

“Don’t see why,” said the Major.

He had just completed the task to his entire satisfaction when “afternoon tea” began.

That was mid-May, 1917.

In the spring of the next year the Major met the Lieutenant, who had been a long while in hospital, and reminded him of their triumphant excursion.

“And what’s more,” he said. “Every one of those eggs got through successfully. Oh, by the way,” he went on, “I was there again this year.”

“Were you really ?” asked the Lieutenant. “But I suppose the bird’s-nesting’s not quite what it was ?”

“Ruined,” said the Major. “We scrapped over every inch of it.”

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